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A review of ecclesiastical
proceedings in the



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A
REVIEW

OF

ECCLESIASTICAL PROCEEDINGS

IN THE

Congregational Church and Society
in *Brooklyn*, (Conn.)

AND PARTICULARLY OF THE

PROCEEDINGS AND RESULT OF THE CONSO-
CIATION OF WINDHAM COUNTY,

IN FEBRUARY, 1817,

UPON

A CHARGE OF HERESY AGAINST THE JUNIOR PASTOR
OF SAID CHURCH AND SOCIETY.

BY LUTHER WILLSON, A. M.
THEIR LATE PASTOR.

“ Judge not, that ye be not judged : for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged ; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

“ By their fruits ye shall know them.”

“ Wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated ; full of mercy and good fruits ; without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

WORCESTER :

PRINTED BY WILLIAM MANNING.—JULY, 1818.

A REVIEW, &c.

[The following documents, with remarks, will afford, it is believed, satisfactory evidence that the Rev. LUTHER WILLSON, the junior pastor of the church in Brooklyn, who had altered his views upon the subject of the Trinity, and was accused of heresy before the Consociation of Windham County, was ever solicitous, from the commencement of the difficulty occasioned by his change of sentiments until the time of his dismissal, to continue with the church and society in Brooklyn in peace, or to leave them peaceable and united among themselves, and in a manner consistent with the principles and character of a Christian minister.]

Record of the Church.

“IN consequence of uneasiness and disaffection in the church and among the people on account of erroneous opinions supposed to be entertained by Mr. Willson, their junior pastor,—Dr. Whitney, their senior pastor, and some members of the church, thought it advisable that there should be a church-meeting appointed to converse with Mr. Willson on the subject, and with his approbation and consent. Accordingly a meeting was appointed on the 8th day of February, 1816, at 3 o'clock, P. M. at the meeting-house. The church accordingly met on said 8th day of February, at said place, for the purpose of inquiring as to a change or supposed change in the opinions of Mr. Willson. Considerable conversation took place on the subject, but no votes passed; and the meeting was adjourned to the 16th of the instant month, at 3 o'clock, P. M. in the meeting-house.

“February 16th—The church met at time and place according to adjournment. After opening with prayer,

John Parish, Esq. was chosen Moderator,* and Capt. Moses Clark, Scribe. The church then requested Mr. Willson to make a statement of his views with respect to the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ. He accordingly declared it as 'his prevailing opinion, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not, in his own nature as a divine person, equal and eternal with the Father, the supreme, self-existent God.' Upon which declaration of Mr. Willson, the church immediately passed the following vote, viz. 'The doctrine of the Trinity is an essential or fundamental doctrine'—thirteen in the affirmative, five in the negative, and five neutral."

Mr. W. after expressing his opinion in the terms thus recorded, declared himself ready to give his reasons for the change that had taken place in his views upon the Divinity of Christ, at that time, or at any time when the church should be disposed to hear them. The church did not, however, *then*, nor have they *since*, discovered any desire to become acquainted with the process of mind, or the reasons, which produced a change in his opinion.

After the vote upon the doctrine of the Trinity, which passed almost immediately upon its being proposed to the church, at the urgent motion of two of its members, and apparently with a particular design to avoid an explanation of their views of this doctrine, or of the object and application of the vote; Mr. W. requested those who joined in it, to inform him in what sense they viewed the doctrine of the Trinity to be essential, or fundamental; whether they intended to be understood as declaring, by that act, that they considered a belief in this doctrine essential to salvation, or to Christian fellowship. Mr. W. observed, that he deemed it a matter of particular, practical importance to a pastor, whose duty it was to propose individuals for admission to Christian privileges, to ascertain the sense of the church, whether they considered such a belief es-

* Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, on account of the infirmities of age, was not able to be from his own house at that season, to preside at the meeting. Mr. W. the junior pastor, expecting his change of sentiments to be the particular subject of inquiry and investigation, and apprehending the necessity of considerable conversation and discussion on his part, which might not be prudent for him to allow himself in the capacity of a Moderator, suggested to the church the propriety of appointing one of their number to preside at the meeting, who would probably be considered more disinterested and impartial. Accordingly Mr. Parish, a member of the church, was chosen Moderator.

sential to Christian fellowship ; stating, that if they considered it thus essential, their views were very different from what he had always supposed ; and that it would be for *his* happiness and *theirs*, that his pastoral relation to them be dissolved. Obtaining no answer to his inquiries as to the meaning and application of the vote, and anxious to know their feelings with respect to him as their pastor, he urged them to express their minds, (after being made acquainted with the change that had taken place in his views upon a doctrine which they then declared fundamental,) whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with him as their minister. The church being unwilling to act in the case, though repeatedly and earnestly solicited, he requested those that were in the vote to call upon him, that he might have opportunity to converse with them, and ascertain their sense of the vote, and also their views with respect to him as their pastor. Several of them called, agreeably to his request ; while others, (about half the number that were in the vote,) and some, indeed, aged and leading members of the church,* never visited him, nor sought an opportunity to converse with him upon the subject. †

It is here proper to remark, that two members who joined in the vote, being unacquainted with the views of those that moved it, and not sufficiently considering its obvious import, or the construction to which it was liable among those that were conversant with ecclesiastical affairs, had occasion, soon after, very much to regret their agency in giving sanction to such a record in the church. Upon reflection, they saw, that without their concurrence the vote would not have passed ; that they had been instrumental in bringing it into the church, though unapprehensive, at the time, of the use that might be made of it, and of the consequences that might result from it. Their only view, when they acted, was to declare their firm belief in the Trinity as a doctrine of revelation ; as one, among others

* Capt. Daniel Tyler and Deacon Joseph Scarborough. Whether these gentlemen considered the request of their pastor unreasonable, and undeserving their attention ; or were disinclined to a candid and full discussion of the subject under consideration ; or were conscious, from their own feelings, of personal animosities that rendered them averse to such an interview ; or were influenced by other motives, is best known to themselves.

† It appeared from conversation with those that called upon Mr. W. that some intended, by their act, no more than a declaration of their settled belief in the Trinity : Others intended by it a publick disapprobation of Mr. W.'s sentiments : Not one, that I recollect, expressed an opinion that a belief in the Trinity was essential to communion.

in connexion, that was essential to make up the Christian system.

From conversation with Mr. W. the junior pastor, they were led to suppose (what afterwards proved true) that the construction put upon the vote declaring the doctrine of the Trinity to be fundamental, by those who claim to be of the orthodox faith, would require a publick assent to it, as necessary to Christian fellowship. With these views, and with serious concern for the evils that might arise from this act of the church, in which they concurred, they were anxious that a meeting should be appointed, to see if the church would not annul their vote upon the doctrine of the Trinity, or so explain and modify it as not to require an assent to it as an indispensable qualification for Christian communion. Accordingly a petition was prepared and signed by them and others, that concurred in the same act, for the purpose of rescinding the vote, or procuring such an explanation as should allow those who might disbelieve the Trinity, the common rights and privileges of members of the church. One of the individuals that signed the petition called upon the Rev. Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, to converse with him, and obtain his opinion of the meaning of the vote. Dr. W. in conversation with him, satisfied his mind that the vote upon the doctrine of the Trinity would not be so construed and applied by the church as to prevent those from enjoying Christian privileges who could not acknowledge the truth of this doctrine. From this interview with Dr. W. he was induced to believe, that a difference of opinion upon this subject would by no means be considered by the church as interrupting the charity and communion of its members. In consequence of this conversation, and relying upon the opinion of Dr. W. as to the sense and construction of the vote, the individuals who had prepared the petition* proceeded no far-

* The number that signed the petition was four—all of them in the vote that declared the doctrine of the Trinity to be fundamental. The petition would have gone forward to the church, and probably with the addition of more names that concurred in the vote, had it not been prevented by the conversation and opinion of the senior pastor. Deducting the four that signed the petition, and concurred in the vote upon the Trinity, from thirteen, the whole number, leaves, at most, but nine in favour of a belief in the Trinity as necessary to communion. These four added to the ten, that did not concur in the vote, gives, at least, fourteen to nine, who did not consider a belief in the Trinity essential to communion. Thus the sense of a majority of the church upon the subject of the Trinity, at the time the vote was passed, as it is collected from circumstances, and by a just calculation, was evidently in favour of a liberal communion. But still, I think, the terms of the vote are fairly interpreted in a different and restricted sense.

ther in pursuance of their object. But, however much to be regretted, Dr. W. and other members of the church, who had hitherto been liberal in their opinions and conduct, have since thought it necessary to practise upon a different principle.

Church Record.

“At a meeting of the congregational church in Brooklyn, warned by the junior pastor of said church on the 24th of March, and holden on the 25th, 1816, Deacon Roger W. Williams was chosen Moderator, and David Prince, Clerk. *Voted*, that this meeting be adjourned to Friday next, at 1 o'clock, P. M. the 29th day of March instant.”

There is an important omission in this record. For what reason, or how it came, I am unable to say.

Dr. W. the senior pastor, has uniformly kept the book of records. When he was unable to attend the meetings, the votes and proceedings of the church were transmitted to him. When he attended, he has made the record according to his own recollection and judgment. In recording, he has sometimes omitted, and sometimes altered, either unintentionally and by accident, or because he thought best. Had the omissions and alterations been made only and apparently with a view to exhibit the records with greater accuracy and precision, and in a more perfect form, without materially affecting the sense, there would be no occasion for this remark.

A record of three successive meetings, (the first, February 8th, and the last, March 25th,) was made out, approved, and voted by the church. The following, a part of the record of the meeting, March 25th, a copy of which, on the same paper with other records, was voted by the church, transmitted to Dr. W. and has since been lost, is here added, as it is important to illustrate after proceedings of a committee of the church before a Council on the first day of May, 1816.

“This meeting of the church was appointed for the purpose of inquiring into the true meaning, extent and application of the vote at the last meeting, Feb. 16th; and also of ascertaining the sentiments of the church, whether they

were satisfied with Mr. W. as a Christian minister ; and whether they wished, or not, that his pastoral relation to them should be dissolved. No vote or resolution was passed explanatory of the vote above-mentioned, nor relative to the other matters proposed for consideration.”— [This record should have been inserted before the vote of adjournment.]

Dr. W. the senior pastor, was particular to state in his record of this meeting, that it was warned by the junior pastor the 24th of March, and held the next day ; while he omitted to mention the object for which it was appointed, as contained in the record transmitted to him ; and also the fact, that the meeting was warned by the junior pastor with his concurrence and approbation. The purpose and time of the meeting were particularly stated to the senior pastor before it was notified, and he concurred in it without any objection, either as to the object or time of the appointment.

The reasons that operated with the junior pastor in appointing this meeting of the church, may be seen from a statement of facts. The church and society in Brooklyn had been considerably agitated for more than two months, through the influence of a few individuals, in consequence of a change in the views of the junior pastor respecting the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ. Several members of the church had been vigilant and active in endeavouring to produce an alarm in the church and society on account of this change. On the 16th of February, the church passed a vote upon the Trinity, which, from the circumstances that occasioned and attended it, appeared to have been designed by those who moved it, as an implied publick censure of the opinions of their pastor. The excitement among the people, arising from the apprehension that the errors of their pastor were destructive in their tendency and fatal in their effects, must necessarily be regarded by a Christian minister with a feeling concern for his own situation, and for that of his people. Among those that professed the greatest zeal for truth, the most pointed passages of scripture against false teachers had become current and familiar ; and though used, in some instances, with studied caution, their intended application and effect

were by no means doubtful in the minds of those that were accustomed to hear them.

As few had conversed with Mr. W. upon his particular sentiments, he wished the congregation to be acquainted with his general views of the divinity of Christ, that the church and society might be prepared, if they were disposed, and circumstances should require it, to act decisively respecting him as their minister. He accordingly delivered a publick discourse, in which he endeavoured briefly to lay open his particular opinions, in distinction from what is commonly considered the orthodox faith; opinions, which he had but intimated in publick before, in two short sentences of a former discourse. At the close of the publick exercises of the Sabbath, immediately after Mr. W.'s discourse, in which were exhibited his distinct and peculiar sentiments, a member of the church* (respected for his age and standing, and distinguished for his zeal in opposition to Mr. W.) with much earnestness and violence called upon the assembly, as they were about to retire, to pause; directed their attention to the preacher; and, in view of the sentiments that had been delivered from the desk, denounced him as a false teacher, and admonished the congregation to beware of his instructions, as full of philosophy and vain deceit.†

In view of these facts, Mr. W. was anxious, as appears from the record that was omitted, [see the record,] and that ought to have been inserted, to know the minds of the church respecting him as their minister, and with respect to the meaning of a certain vote, which, from its doubtful phraseology, the cautious silence of those that moved it, and their reluctance to explain at the time it was passed, appeared to have been introduced with a particular design,‡ and to have an alarming tendency upon the peace and tranquillity of the church. While thus observing the movements of those that had influence in the church; their

* Capt. Daniel Tyler.

† I will not omit to observe, that this is all the friendly admonition, within my recollection, that this gentleman ever thought proper to administer to his pastor, either publickly or privately, to reclaim him from what he considered a most dangerous error. And, indeed, the admonition administered seemed principally intended as an alarm or warning to the congregation.

‡ Mr. W. not being able to obtain an explanation, wished to know of them, if they intended by it to impose upon him any restriction as to avowing or preaching his sentiments. They were silent; they gave him no answer.

publick acts, their private insinuations and publick reproaches, evidently designed to destroy his reputation as a Christian teacher ; it was impossible for Mr. W. not to be solicitous to be relieved from the suspense necessarily attending his situation, by obtaining the sentiments of the church respecting him as their pastor. He hoped and believed, that none who were opposed to his ministry would be so disingenuous as to conceal their sentiments with respect to him, or to express them in ambiguous terms. They did not, however, think proper, at the meeting, (with the exception of a few individuals,) to disclose their sentiments in relation to the subjects proposed for consideration. And, indeed, these individuals expressed nothing of their opinions and feelings in regard to the propriety of Mr. W.'s dismissal.

Before the meeting was adjourned, Mr. W. proposed to unite with the church in calling a Mutual Council, to take a view of all difficulties, and to give their advice. A Mutual Council was agreed upon at the adjourned meeting for that purpose, and convened at the time appointed.

Record of the Adjourned Meeting.

“ March 29th—The church met according to adjournment.

“ *Voted*, to accept of Mr. Willson's proposal to call a Mutual Council to consider existing matters of difficulty, and advise to measures for terminating them ; and agreed to invite the Rev. Joseph Sumner, D. D. of Shrewsbury, Andrew Lee, D. D. of Lisbon, and Rev. Abiel Williams, of Dudley, with delegates from the churches of which they are pastors, to meet at Brooklyn, on Wednesday, the first day of May next, at 10 o'clock, A. M. to afford that advice and direction, which it is hoped may happily tend to the restoration of peace among us.

“ *Voted*, that Joseph Scarborough, Esq. Capt. Moses Clark, and Capt. Benjamin Pierce, should be a committee to lay matters of grievance before the Council.”

The Council met at the time appointed, the first of May ; and, after forming, adjourned to the meeting-house to attend to business.

Statement before the Council by the Committee of the Church.

“The committee of the church, appointed to lay their matters of grievance before this venerable Council, would beg leave to exhibit the following statement :

“That for a great length of time, under the ministration of their Rev. senior pastor, previous to his labours’ being interrupted by the infirmities of age, this church enjoyed unusual peace and tranquillity.

“That, from its first organization, it hath uniformly professed the belief of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, as being essential articles of the Christian system, and as lying at the foundation of all our hope.

“That when the Rev. Luther Willson was ordained over this church as a colleague pastor, he was ordained by a Trinitarian Council ; and by the profession which he then made, was considered as being consentaneous with the church on these important subjects.

“That, in process of time, the Rev. Luther Willson hath departed from these articles of faith ; and hath expressly declared, not only in private, but also from the pulpit, that it is his prevailing opinion, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not, in his own nature as a divine person, equal and eternal with the Father, the supreme and self-existent God.

“That this change of opinion as to the character of the Saviour, being frequently and clearly evinced, has wounded the feelings of not a few, who feel it their indispensable duty to honour the Son even as they honour the Father, in obedience to what they find written, John v. 23 ; fully believing, that they who do not honour the Son as they honour the Father, do not honour the Father.

“And as the church, on account of this important change of sentiment, can no longer be edified under his ministration, they would request the advice of this venerable Council as to measures to be taken for the removal of difficulties and restoration of peace.—And may the blessing of God attend all efforts to accomplish these desirable ends.”

This statement, both for its contents and the circumstances attending it, ought not to pass without notice.

1. It declares, "that this church, from its first organization, has uniformly professed the belief of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, as being essential articles of the Christian system, and as lying at the foundation of all our hope."

Such a declaration, it is presumed, could never have been expected by the church from any of its members, who are distinguished for good sense, candour and integrity. The extreme incorrectness of this part of the statement must be obvious to every unbiassed mind, acquainted with the records and practice of the church.

The church in Brooklyn has long been distinguished from most of the other churches in the county of Windham for its liberality in matters of faith. In making this declaration, I wish it to be understood, that this church has *not* required of its members a profession of their belief in the Trinity, the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ, and other particular doctrines of what is commonly called the orthodox creed, as most other churches have done.*

It is well known, that several clerical gentlemen, and others in the county, who claim to be sound in the faith, have been accustomed to speak of the church and people in Brooklyn, and their aged pastor, in terms of disapprobation and reproach, for what *they* considered their lax and latitudinarian principles.

The fact respecting the church in Brooklyn is believed to be simply this. Its members have generally considered themselves believers in the Trinity, as also their pastor; though an assent to this doctrine, or a profession of their belief in

* I mention other churches, because it is probable that the committee wished to have it understood by the Ecclesiastical Council, that this church was originally established, and had continued to practise, upon the same principles with other churches who were known to recognize, in their admission of members, what is commonly considered the orthodox faith; or because the best apology that can, perhaps, be offered by the committee for presenting a statement so incorrect, is the fact, that it was prepared by a Rev. gentleman in the neighbourhood, Mr. Dow, of Thompson, to whom they applied to assist them as counsel; whose tone of religious sentiments is *always correct*; and who, in preparing the statement, probably drew it up under the impression, that the church in Brooklyn were, or *ought to have been*, as orthodox as *himself* and the church of which he was pastor. He probably thought it a favourable time to represent the church in Brooklyn as declaring, through the agency of their committee, that they had professed the same opinions, and were established, as to doctrines, upon the same foundation as other churches which *he* considered sound in the faith. The committee, notwithstanding, are responsible for the statement; and ought not to have yielded implicitly to the views and feelings of their Rev. counsellor.

it, has never been regarded in practice as essential to the Christian character, or to the enjoyment of Christian privileges in the church.

The committee declare, that "the church have *uniformly professed* their belief of this doctrine, as lying at the foundation of all their hope."

From this it would seem, that the church had ever publicly avowed their belief in the doctrine of the Trinity as essential to the Christian's hope. It is however a fact, capable of the most satisfactory and abundant proof, that, for nearly three years previous to this statement of the committee, (during which time about thirty persons were admitted, upon examination, to the communion of the church,) there was seldom, if ever, any inquiry of those that were admitted as members, respecting their belief in the Trinity, or the real proper deity of Jesus Christ.

When individuals manifested a desire to become united to the church, as professed friends and disciples of Christ, it was usual for the pastors to be together to converse with them, and recommend them to the consideration and acceptance of the church. The conversation with these individuals was generally held at the house of the senior pastor, who, at the close of the conversation, almost uniformly read to them the covenant that had been in use in the church, to obtain their assent to it. This covenant contains nothing of the Trinity, or of the real proper deity of Jesus Christ. Their assent to this covenant was considered by the *senior* as well as *junior* pastor a sufficient test of their faith; and I do not recollect the examination of any person upon the subject of the Trinity, or the essential divinity of Christ.

Thus it is so far from being true, that the church, agreeably to the statement of the committee, has from its first organization professed a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity as a fundamental article of the Christian faith, that, for several years, as far as I am acquainted with the practice of the church, it has not *required a professed belief* in this doctrine in *any instance*; and *much less* as a necessary qualification for Christian communion.

Much has been said, in the late controversy, by individuals, of the original covenant, subscribed by those that first formed themselves into a church. This covenant recog-

nizes the distinction of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, as one God; yet it does not maintain a *professed belief* in this distinction as necessary to Christian fellowship,* but particularly provides for the admission of any persons to the communion of the church who exhibit credible and satisfactory evidence of their piety, by religious and exemplary conversation. But this covenant, it is to be observed, as an ordinary test of faith and character, has long been out of use; or, what is more probable, it was never used at all. It was unknown to most of the present members of the church, until the late controversy, and is still unknown to several of its most aged members. Indeed, it is fully believed, that the greater part of the church are still unacquainted with its contents, except what they have occasionally received from others.

I shall here insert the only covenant used in the church in the admission of members, that the candid and intelligent may judge, whether this church have *uniformly professed* a belief in the Trinity, &c. as lying at the foundation of all their hope.

Covenant.

“You do now, in the presence of God, his holy angels, and this assembly, solemnly, seriously, and sincerely, as far as you know your own heart, avouch the Lord Jehovah, the only true and living God, to be your God; and profess your belief of all the articles of the Christian faith, as revealed in the word of God. You give up yourself to God in Christ, acknowledging God the Father to be your God and sovereign. You give yourself to the Lord Jesus Christ as your only prophet and teacher; your priest and atonement; your king and lawgiver. You give yourself to the Holy Ghost, as your only sanctifier and comforter. And you give up yourself to the

* The following is the 3d article of the original covenant:—

“Thirdly, We do covenant and promise (as much as in us lies) the best spiritual good of all that at present are, or shall hereafter, in a way of gospel order, become members of this church, by instruction, reprehension, exhortation, consolation, and spiritual watchfulness over them for good; and we do farther covenant and promise (as God shall help) to receive, upon offers, to our full communion in a church state, all such persons as are orthodox in faith, free from scandal, and able to examine themselves and discern the Lord's body; as also to rest satisfied with such admittance of adult persons into this church as is performed, either by making a confession of faith, and relation of a work of grace on their hearts, or producing testimonies of their reputed piety, or who do charitably discover the same by religious and exemplary conversation.”

watch and care of this church of our Lord Jesus Christ, promising, by the help of his Spirit, to walk with him and his church in all ways of holy communion and fellowship, and in due observance of all his ordinances, according to his will, as revealed in his word.—This you profess and promise.

“*Min.*—I then promise, in the name of this church, that, by assistance of the same Spirit, we will walk toward you in all Christian love and watchfulness, for our mutual comfort and edification in the Lord Jesus.”

I now proceed to notice other parts of the statement.—The committee declare, “that when the Rev. Luther Willson was ordained over this church, as a colleague pastor, he was ordained by a Trinitarian Council; and, by the profession which he then made, was considered as being consentaneous with the church on these important subjects.”

That Mr. W. before and at the time of his ordination, avowed his belief in the Trinity, and the essential divinity of Christ, is true. But that he regarded such a belief as essential to the hope and privilege of a Christian, is *wholly a mistake*.

At the time Mr. W. was a candidate for settlement in Brooklyn, a committee was appointed by the society, consisting principally of members of the church, to converse with him, and to ascertain if he was a Hopkinsian or an Arian. Upon examination, he gave them satisfactory evidence that he was not a Hopkinsian or an Arian. At the same time he was particular to inform them, that though he differed in opinion from Hopkinsians and Arians, and believed them both to be in an error as to their *peculiar* sentiments, yet he considered them as Christians, entitled to his respect and fellowship. He was explicit in stating his views, that a diversity of opinion in these respects ought not to occasion distance and separation among brethren. He also stated to the committee, that in the course of years from the time he was licensed to preach, his views of Christian doctrines had in some respects altered, and that, in pursuing his inquiries, he still considered himself liable to change. He gave them no assurance that his opinions would continue the same, even upon the subjects in

question. He was explicit in declaring his determination to adhere to the scriptures as the only rule of faith, and his endeavours to interpret them according to his best and most impartial judgment, whatever might be the result of his inquiries, and however different might be his views in future upon the subjects in question, or upon any of the doctrines of Christianity.

Mr. W. never gave the committee the least intimation of his belief in the Trinity as a fundamental doctrine of the Christian religion. He clearly expressed to them his favourable opinion of both *Arians* and *Hopkinsians* as *real Christians*, from whom the hand of fellowship ought not to be withheld. Such were his views, and such his profession, when the church in Brooklyn invited him to settle with them as colleague pastor with Dr. Whitney.

From conversation with the committee, the terms of the church covenant, the unanimity of the church in choosing him as their minister, and from acquaintance with their aged pastor, Mr. W. had not the least reason to believe, that the church in Brooklyn considered or professed a belief in the Trinity, as essential to their salvation, or to the Christian's hope. If the church, at the time of Mr. W.'s settlement, attached such importance to the doctrine of the Trinity, they certainly did not make it known to him. The committee could not, therefore, state with any propriety, that, "by the profession which he then made, he was considered as being consentaneous with the church on these important subjects," if the church, agreeably to their statement, had uniformly professed their belief of the Trinity, and of the proper deity of Christ, as essential to the Christian system, and as lying at the foundation of all their hope; for they *knew*, that Mr. W. at the time of his settlement, did not consider a belief in the Trinity and the deity of Christ, thus essential.

It is farther stated, "that Mr. W.'s change of sentiments, being frequently and clearly evinced, had wounded the feelings of not a few, who fully believed, that they who do not honour the Son" (meaning equally, in the character of Supreme) "as they honour the Father, do not honour the Father."

It is evident that the committee wished it to be understood by the Council, that the views of Mr. W. were so

erroneous as to prove him essentially deficient in Christian piety and obedience to God. For if those who do not honour the Son as they honour the Father, by acknowledging him to be God, equal with the Father, *do not honour the Father*,* they certainly do not possess the character of God's

* The committee, it is presumed, indulged the hope of satisfying the minds of the Council, that a considerable number regarded the error of their pastor as absolutely inconsistent with Christian principles; and to effect their object in this particular, they inadvertently or intentionally, by the use of additional and qualifying terms, spoke a language different from that of our Saviour in the passage to which they refer. Our Saviour says, "He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." The committee would have it understood, that "they who do not honour the Son *as they honour the Father*, do not honour the Father." According to my understanding, there may be a difference between not honouring the Son *at all*, and not honouring him *as we honour the Father*.

Suppose, for example, a worthy gentleman possesses a large estate, and has many servants at his command, whom he employs to cultivate and improve it. Suppose, for his own convenience, he should commit the management of his affairs to his only son, who is as worthy as himself; and should require his servants to pay the same respect to his son that they had done to the father; informing them, that, if they did not obey and respect his son, he should consider it a matter of disrespect to himself. May we not imagine these servants to be affectionate, obedient, and respectful to the son, though not equally as they were to the father? And would it be just to conclude, because they are not *perfectly obedient* to the will of the father in rendering *every degree of respect* to the son that was required, that they do *not honour* the son, nor the father, but are wholly disrespectful and disobedient to both?—Allowing, for a moment, the views of the committee to be correct, in requiring all to honour the Son (meaning in his character as God) equally as they honour the Father, does it necessarily follow, that all who do not thus honour the Son, do not honour him at all? Is there no medium between the highest reverence and absolute neglect or irreverence? Is there no medium between perfect faith and positive unbelief? God requires us to be merciful *even as he is merciful*. But does it follow, because we are not as merciful as God, (I refer to the degree, not the nature of the virtue required) that we are destitute of mercy? God requires servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in *all things*, showing *all good fidelity*. But are we to infer, because servants are not obedient in *all things*, and *perfect examples of fidelity*, that they are not in *any degree* obedient and faithful? It is the duty of a son to love and honour a father according to his real dignity, kindness and virtue. But shall we conclude that the son who does not love him *as affectionately*, and honour him *as highly* as he deserves, is destitute of filial affection and respect, and in *no degree* the object of his father's complacency and approbation? For myself, I believe, that a son may not esteem and honour his father in proportion to the real worth and excellence of his character, and yet, *in a degree*, be respectful, affectionate, and obedient. So, I suppose, a believer in Christ, from imperfect knowledge, or a mistaken apprehension of his real dignity, (rather than from want of affection) may not love and honour him in so *high* a character as he *actually possesses*, and yet be a sincere friend, an obedient servant, a true disciple; one who, in honouring the Son, (though not so highly as he ought,) honours the Father, that sent him.

To give the true meaning of the passage referred to in the statement, in which Christ is thought to claim for himself the worship of the supreme God, I will briefly remark, that the ground on which all men are to honour the Son *even as they honour the Father*, is not, his underived and essential divinity, but the office he sustains as one *commissioned or ordained* of God to be the Judge of the world. "The Father judgeth no man; but hath *committed* all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father, which hath sent him." The judgment of the Son, which he derives from the Father, and administers by his authority and appointment, is as perfect and infallible as if it were administered *immediately by God himself*. We are therefore to honour the judgment of the Son *even as the judgment of the Father*. In the distribution of

children; they are not an example of that filial reverence, love and obedience which are essential to the character of a real Christian. The committee, it seems, wishing to heal and terminate existing difficulties, and in pursuance of an object so desirable, did not scruple to include their pastor in the number of those who were to be regarded as destitute of true friendship and piety to God. This I think a fair construction of this part of the statement; for the individual whose errors are such that he does not honour God, his heavenly Father, can have no claim to the character of sincere piety and exemplary virtue. He cannot be a friend of God, or disciple of Jesus Christ.

The committee, in closing their statement, inform the Council, that, "as the church, on account of Mr. W.'s important change of sentiment, can no longer be edified under his ministration, they would request their advice as to measures to be taken for the removal of difficulties and restoration of peace."

The committee wished the Council to understand, and therefore thought it proper to state, in direct terms, that the church could no longer be edified under Mr. W.'s ministration. How did the committee know this? They certainly did not obtain their information from the church. Mr. W. after his change of sentiments, had more than once earnestly requested the church, at publick meetings, and even at the last meeting before the convening of the Council, to declare whether they were dissatisfied with him as their minister; but they had never expressed their dissatisfaction, or their desire that his pastoral labours among them should be discontinued.

From the complexion of the whole statement, it was evidently the plan of the committee so to manage the affair before the Council, as to convince them, if possible, of the necessity of Mr. W.'s dismissal, with the expectation that the Council would advise to such an event. This was what the committee were desirous to have accomplish-

rewards and punishments, we may be sure that his decision is *unerringly just*; for the Father imparts to him knowledge and power adequate to the work which he has appointed him. Of this our Saviour expressly informs us. "I can of *mine own self* do nothing. As I *hear*, I judge; and my judgment is *just*; because I seek not *mine own will*, but the *will of the Father*, which hath sent me." Thus we conclude: He that does not honour the Son as one whom God hath sent, as one whom he has *commissioned or appointed* to render to all according to their works, does not honour the Father, who gave him his authority.

ed, although the professed object of calling the Council was "to obtain their advice and direction as to proper steps to be taken for healing and terminating existing difficulties."

The whole business of calling a Council, from the time the proposal was made, until it was carried into effect, was conducted upon principles apparently pacifick and conciliatory, and professedly with a design to effect a reconciliation and union, where differences existed. Thus it was understood by Mr. W. by the church, and by the society, who had a meeting for the purpose of expressing their approbation of the measure; and thus it was understood by the Council, from the terms of the letter missive, prepared by Dr. W. the senior pastor. But this was not the object of the committee. It was *their* design to manage the affair as cautiously and advantageously as possible, to obtain the advice of the Council in favour of Mr. W.'s dismissal. If by any means they could convince the Council that such an event was necessary, or expedient, and could procure a result favourable to their views, they had scarcely a doubt, that their ultimate object would be accomplished; that all parties would concur in the Result, from a respect to the opinion of the Council; and that the dismissal of Mr. W. would eventually take place.

With these views, the committee thought it proper, in their statement, to *magnify* the difficulty on account of the change of sentiment, that a reconciliation might appear to the Council altogether impracticable, and that the removal of their pastor from his relation to the church in Brooklyn might appear the only method of restoring peace.

The correctness of these remarks, as to the *design* of the committee, is sufficiently verified by the statement, compared with the covenant and records of the church. The statement represents the church in Brooklyn always to have been highly orthodox in their profession of the doctrine of the Trinity, &c. as lying at the foundation of all their hope. The covenant says, no. It does not even recognize the distinction of three persons in one God; nor does it intimate that Christ is God.

The committee represent the church as requesting "the advice of the Council as to measures to be taken for the removal of difficulties and restoration of peace;" and the

Reason assigned for making this request is, that "the church, on account of Mr. W.'s important change of sentiment, could no longer be edified under his ministration." The Council were requested to advise to measures for the removal of difficulties. But how was it possible to remove the difficulties without removing the pastor, inasmuch "as the church" (according to the committee) "could no longer be edified under his ministration."— Thus the committee employed their utmost ingenuity (or rather the ingenuity of their Rev. counsellor, who drew up the statement) to make it appear to the Council, without declaring it in direct terms, that the church considered the removal of Mr. W. from his pastoral labours among them the only method of removing difficulties and restoring peace. The records, however, (particularly the record omitted by the senior pastor) would make it evident, and *did* make it evident to the Council, that the church (though repeatedly requested to show their minds upon the subject) never declared themselves dissatisfied with Mr. W.'s ministry, nor their opinion or wish in favour of his dismissal.

The introduction of the statement speaks of "the committee of the church appointed to lay their matters of grievance before the Council." Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, also, in his record of the preceding meeting, used nearly the same language. From this it would seem, that the church were disaffected and aggrieved with Mr. W.'s ministry, and had authorized the committee to bring forward a complaint against their pastor. The record of the meeting March 29th, though made by the senior pastor, will however show, that the proposal to call a Council originated with Mr. W. and that the object of the proposal was to obtain the opinion and advice of a Council as to measures for terminating existing matters of difficulty. It never entered the mind of Mr. W. that he and the church, in pursuance of conciliatory measures, were to appear before the Council in the attitude of systematick hostility and mutual recrimination. It did not occur to him, that this would be the proper method of "healing and terminating difficulties." He expected, before the Council, a candid and full disclosure of the circumstances that had occasioned the difficulties, and that tended to increase them. He indulged the hope, that all concerned would make it a matter of

principle to state facts with fairness and precision, and that the whole affair would be conducted with a Christian spirit, and in a manner ingenuous and respectful. Mr. W. had not the least expectation, when an arrangement was made to obtain the advice of a Council, that the *committee* would represent the *church* in the capacity of *complainants*; or that they would call in a neighbouring minister to prepare a false and exaggerated statement, and to reproach their pastor for his infidelity;* and especially, when they knew that the *church* had never declared themselves aggrieved with his ministry, nor laboured with him to convince him of any error or offence. A few individuals (not a fourth part of the brethren of the church) had conversed with Mr. W. respecting his change of sentiments, and had manifested their disapprobation of his opinions; but not one of them had said, or intimated, that his errors were such as to be inconsistent with the piety and virtue of a Christian. The committee, however, would have the Council believe, that the *church* considered the error of their pastor to be *fundamental*; that the *church* were aggrieved, and could no longer be edified with his ministry; and that the *church* had appointed them to make this complaint.

I now close these remarks upon the statement with a few repetitions and additions.

First. The statement is virtually a *complaint* against the pastor, *unauthorized* by the *church*. Thus it was considered by the Council; [see the *Result*.] It implicitly represents him essentially deficient in the faith and piety of the gospel; an unedifying and unprofitable teacher in the Christian church.

Secondly. The Council was called, by mutual agreement, "to give their advice and direction as to proper steps to be taken for healing and terminating existing difficulties."

* The Rev. gentleman who was counsel for the committee, in the course of his remarks before the Ecclesiastical Council, referring to Mr. W. spoke of him as an Arian. Mr. W. interrupting him, wished to be informed if he meant to apply to him that name in an appropriate sense, as designating one that believed our Saviour to be a created being. His reply was, "It matters not whether he believe, with Arius, that our Saviour is a created being, or with others that deny his *real divinity*; we can no more commune with *him* that denies the supreme deity of Jesus Christ, than with a Pagan or a Mussulman."

Thirdly. The committee thought it proper, in pursuance of the object for which the Council was called, to invite the Rev. Mr. Dow, of Thompson, one of the most zealous orthodox clergymen in the county, to counsel and assist them.

Fourthly. The Rev. Mr. Dow accordingly came, and assisted them in preparing the complaint; and also thought it his duty, in the course of his observations before the Council, and in his endeavours to restore peace, to assign their pastor, on the ground of faith, no more than a respectable rank with Mussulmen and Pagans.

Fifthly. The committee who invited, or employed, the Rev. gentleman to assist them, appeared to hear him with much patience, if not satisfaction; at least, they manifested before the Council no displeasure at the censoriousness of his remarks.

Sixthly. The complaint against the pastor was never seen nor approved by the church; nor was a copy of it ever presented to the pastor, nor its contents made known to him, until it was read before the Council.

Seventhly. Deacon Scarborough, the chairman of the committee, to whom the statement, I have no doubt, is principally to be attributed, declared openly in society meeting, only two days before it was read to the Council, that he was not prepared to hold up his hand in favour of Mr. W.'s dismissal.

Eighthly. Another of the committee, the same day, being asked by a member of the church, if the committee intended to bring any complaint, or charges, against Mr. W. before the Council, replied, that he did not know whether they should bring any complaint against him, or not.

This was the manner in which the business was laid before the Council by the committee, and these were some of the principal circumstances attending it.*

* The Ecclesiastical Council, before whom the statement was made, formed the first of May about eleven o'clock, and immediately adjourned to the meeting-house. After attending to the statement and a few observations connected with it, they adjourned until two o'clock; at which time the church met according to appointment, to be in a capacity of attending to any questions that might be proposed, and of acting upon any subjects that should be thought proper to be laid before them. After Mr. Dow, the counsel for the committee, had completed his remarks in support of the statement, Mr. Willson observed to the Council, that the church had never seen the statement; that they knew nothing what it contained. He wished, therefore, it might be read to the church, that they might express their minds upon it, and manifest by their vote, before the Council, whether they concurred in it. As soon as it was proposed by

The Result of the Council of May 1, 1816.

“At an Ecclesiastical Council convened at Brooklyn, by letters from the congregational church of Christ in said Brooklyn, on the first of May, 1816;—present,

Rev. JOSEPH SUMNER, D. D. chosen *Moderator* ;
ANDREW LEE, D. D. *Scribe* ;
ABIEL WILLIAMS ;

Delegates,

THOMAS W. WARD ;
DEACON NATHAN LORD ;
AARON TUFTS.

“The Council, after forming, adjourned to the meeting-house, where the Moderator addressed the throne of grace on the occasion.

“In the letters missive written to the members of this Council, they are informed, ‘that matters disquieting, and interrupting the peace of the church in this place, have recently occurred, and are of such magnitude and deleterious tendency, as to lead to a wish for advice and assistance of sister churches in endeavours to prevent their increase, and to open a way for a happy termination of them. That a committee of the church will lay matters before the Council for their consideration and direction as to proper steps to be taken for healing and terminating the existing difficulties.’

“When the Council had convened and formed, the committee of the church exhibited their complaint against the Rev. Mr. Willson, junior pastor of said church, setting forth, that he had changed his sentiments since his settle-

Mr. W. that the church should declare their concurrence or non-concurrence in the statement of the committee, the Rev. Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, when he found that the church were to be called upon to express their minds upon the statement, immediately arose and adjourned the meeting, without consulting the church or council as to the adjournment; and thus prevented the church from declaring their minds in regard to the statement, and to their junior pastor, who had just been censured by Mr. Dow, the committee’s counsel, as one that denied the Christian faith. This was evidently done by the senior pastor to save the committee from merited reproach. Had the church acted in the case, they would no doubt have disapproved of the statement. The senior pastor was aware of this; and, to save the committee from the censure of the church in making a false representation, as contained in the statement, he *absolutely*, without consulting the church, adjourned the meeting until the next day to hear the Result of Council. The Council, however, were satisfied of the incorrectness of the statement from the examination of documents, and from the agreement of the parties as to several important facts.

ment among them, respecting the doctrine of the Trinity ; that he now declared it his prevailing opinion, 'that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not, in his own nature as a divine person, equal and eternal with the Father, the supreme and self-existent God.' It also appeared that the church at a meeting voted, that 'the doctrine of the Trinity is an essential and fundamental doctrine.' But in what sense they considered it essential and fundamental, was left undetermined.

"On inquiry, it appears to this Council, that Mr. Willson considers Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, a divine person, and entitled to divine homage ; that he assents to the covenant which hath been used in this church as correct ; and fully and firmly believes the doctrines commonly received in the churches of our country.

"It does not appear to this Council, that either the church or society in this place consider Mr. Willson as having forfeited his ministerial character by his change of sentiments, or that they wish his removal from office among them.

"The opinion of this Council respecting Mr. Willson's sentiments is not required. Every church hath a right to choose their own pastor : Mr. Willson hath been chosen as the pastor of this church : That he is not yet the man of their choice, appears by nothing which hath been laid before this Council.

"The Council, agreeably to the letters sent them, can therefore only advise them *to follow the things which make for peace, and whereby one may edify another.* They earnestly recommend it to this church and society *to put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness*—to bear with one another ;—would advise them *to search the scriptures, and judge of themselves what is right*—what the scriptures teach respecting every Christian doctrine ; to receive what they find there taught, and to act conscientiously before God, as those who expect to give account of themselves to God ; and to give their brethren the same liberty which they assume to themselves.

"In this state of darkness and doubt, entire uniformity of sentiments is not to be expected. Christians should bear with one another, looking forward to the world of light, where they will doubtless see eye to eye, and rejoice

together in the presence of their God and Redeemer. It is gratifying to this Council to find, that this church and society have long been blessed with peace and unity to an uncommon degree. They lament any interruption of these blessings at present; but rejoice that there is no difference now apparent among them, except a difference of opinion respecting one mysterious article of faith, which hath divided the church for many centuries. It is our hope and prayer to God for them, that this disagreement may not continue to cause divisions, but that they may love as brethren, and bear with one another as becomes brethren in the Lord.

“The preceding passed unanimously as the Result of the Council, and is witnessed by each of us subscribing the same.

JOSEPH SUMNER,
ANDREW LEE,
ABIEL WILLIAMS,
THOMAS W. WARD,
NATHAN LORD,
AARON TUFTS.”

Immediately upon the publishing of the Result, the major part of the church declared, by vote, their approbation. Several members, that were opposed to Mr. W.’s ministry, though they were solicitous to call the Council to advise, manifested, by their vote, that they were dissatisfied with the Result.*

A little more than a month after, several brethren made it manifest by a written communication, that they could not commune with the junior pastor and brethren of the church.

“*To the Rev. LUTHER WILLSON, Junior Pastor, and to the Brethren of the Church of Christ in Brooklyn.*

“We, who are members of said church, having our minds impressed with a sense of the present unhappy state, both of the church and society in this place, have thought

* It soon appeared, that a Result formed upon pacifick and liberal principles, and inculcating a spirit of mutual forbearance and condescension, the duty of searching the scriptures, and the right of private judgment and free inquiry, was by no means acceptable to several members of the church. Peace, upon any principle that would allow to their pastor and others an equal right of interpreting the scriptures for themselves, and of occasionally avowing their opinions, was no peace for *them* worth possessing.

it our indispensable duty to address you on the subject, Having a desire to follow the things that make for peace, we have endeavoured carefully to examine ourselves, and search after the path of duty. We are constrained to say, that we think it our duty to content ourselves at present with a quiet and peaceable retirement; for how can we commune together with such discordant sentiments, views and feelings? * It is our earnest desire and prayer to God, that the great Shepherd would pour out his spirit upon us, ministers and people, that we might be led to adopt such measures as shall be for the glory of God, and the good of his church and people in this place.

| | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Daniel Tyler,</i> | <i>David Prince,</i> |
| <i>Joseph Scarborough,</i> | <i>Joel Scarborough,</i> |
| <i>Moses Clark,</i> | <i>Benjamin Pierce,</i> |
| <i>Jezeiah Sumner,</i> | <i>Delano Pierce,</i> |
| <i>William Barrett,</i> | <i>Samuel Butts.†</i> |

“ June 10, 1816.”

* By this example, we learn the method of withdrawing from a church, when we have a minister that we are unwilling to hear.

In the first place, if he does not preach what we believe to be the truth, we are not under obligation to take the steps pointed out in the New Testament, to convince and reclaim him; but are at liberty to excite as much opposition to his ministry as we can, with the hope that the opposition we excite may induce him to ask a dismission.

Secondly, if he should not ask a dismission, but propose to join us in calling a Mutual Council to give their advice, and to heal and terminate all difficulties, we will thank him for his proposal, and most cordially unite with him in calling a Council to advise us to peace. At the same time, we will so manage the business before the Council, as, if possible, to procure a Result in favour of his dismission.

Thirdly, if the advice of the Council should not accord with our opinions and feelings, and a majority of the church should be disposed to conform to it, still we are not to consider the Result of an advisory Council, or the voice of the church, as a necessary rule for us. We think it best, as occasion requires, to be governed by a rule of *our own*.

Fourthly, as our minister has neither asked a dismission on account of our dissatisfaction, nor the Council advised to it, nor the church taken measures for its accomplishment, we think it our duty, from a desire of peace, after a careful self-examination, to content ourselves with a *quiet and peaceable* retirement. Though our covenant engagements require us to watch over our minister and our brethren, and to have a care for their spiritual and immortal interest; and though we are expressly informed, that if we convert a brother who has cried from the truth, we shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins; yet the efficacy of the means which God has appointed for that purpose, we consider extremely uncertain: It is not therefore expedient to put forth any exertion to reclaim our minister or our brethren. After informing them, that their sentiments, views, and feelings, are such that we cannot with a good conscience commune with them, we, for the present, leaving them to themselves, and praying that something may be done for the honor of God, and the good of his church, *quietly and peaceably retire*. We do not think it proper to walk with the church of which we are members “in all ways of holy communion and fellowship,” according to our covenant; but we will do all the good we can, in convincing the people, both at home and abroad, of the errors of our minister, and of the folly of those that adhere to him, *peaceably* in a private way.

† After receiving this communication, Mr. W. before the next communion, visited the brethren who subscribed it. Two of them declared to him expressly in conversa-

Two sacramental occasions were observed, and none of the above members were present.

As they closed their communication with an earnest desire that suitable measures might be adopted for the honour of God, and the good of the church and people in Brooklyn, it was reasonably expected that they would soon propose some measures adapted to promote an object so desirable.

Making no proposals whatever, and continuing to separate themselves from the communion, the junior pastor thought it best to make propositions to the church, embracing particular points of difference, and affording a full opportunity for all complaints and differences to be considered and finally determined by a mutual and impartial Council.

PROPOSITIONS to the Congregational Church in Brooklyn; intended, if approved by them, to be laid before the Society, for their concurrence, as far as it might be proper for the Society to act upon them, in connexion with the Church.

“ To the Brethren of the Congregational Church in Brooklyn.

“ Having contemplated the situation of this church and people in consequence of divisions, occasioned by my change of sentiments,* made known to the church, at their

tion, that, though they had signed the communication, they had not fully made up their minds to withdraw from communion; and that when they signed it, it was understood that they were at liberty to attend the communion, if they pleased. But they never attended. Their brethren, it is probable, convinced them that it was not best.

I cannot but observe here, that one of the number that withdrew had not been able to attend publick worship or communion for some time, on account of sickness; and it was not expected by many that he would ever be able to attend again. Mr. W. had frequently visited him in his sickness; but he had never conversed with Mr. W. upon his change of sentiments, nor could he know any thing of his opinions but from reports. What was most remarkable, very soon after he withdrew, he desired Mr. W. to visit him, and asked him to pray with him, as readily as he had been accustomed to do before; and there is not the least reason to believe, that he would have signed the communication, had he not, in his feeble situation, been particularly persuaded by his good brethren that visited him and conversed with him upon the subject.—The number that withdrew was about a third part of the brethren of the church,

* At the meeting when this communication was made to the church, an opposer of Mr. W.'s ministry repeatedly mentioned, with much apparent satisfaction, that Mr. W. acknowledged himself the occasion of the divisions that existed in the church and society, as if he had been the blameable or criminal cause of those divisions. It was customary with certain individuals at that time, and has been during the controversy, to place all the sin of contention and division at the door of Mr. W. Mr. W. never, as I recollect, took it upon him to assert his guilt or innocence in the case; for he never supposed that his assertion would prove him either innocent or guilty.

request, at a church meeting last February; having considered the continuance and progress of difficulties among us; and having long expected that the brethren who were disaffected at my change of sentiments, and my ministry, would ingenuously and candidly forward some regular complaint against me, your junior pastor; or some propositions for an amicable adjustment of difficulties, or for an equitable, peaceable, and, as far as circumstances would admit, honourable dissolution of my pastoral connexion with this church; and as no propositions of this kind have been made, nor any such proceeding adopted, (which I thought reasonable to be expected,) but a different course pursued, such as openly and decidedly to withdraw from our communion, at least for a time, without consulting our opinion and feelings upon a matter of such importance; I have thought proper to propose several things for your consideration.

“1. Will you agree to adopt proper measures for ascertaining the minds and feelings of this church and people with respect to my dismissal; whether, all circum-

That his change of sentiments has been the occasion of divisions in Brooklyn, is a fact which he has uniformly been disposed to admit, and of which he is perfectly willing that his enemies (if he has any) should avail themselves as much as they please. He has not yet discernment enough to know, that *simply* to be the occasion of any event, as happy or calamitous in its effects, is a *certain proof* of innocence or guilt. The conduct of Judas in betraying Jesus, and of the Jews in crucifying him, was an occasion of the happiest effects to mankind; but Christians have never supposed Judas or the Jews to have been innocent in thus being the occasion of so great good to the world.

The preaching of Christ and his apostles in Judea, and of his apostles in different parts of Asia and Europe, occasioned, in many places, a most important change in the religion, customs and manners of the people, and also very serious divisions and persecutions; but Christians have never been disposed to fix upon Christ, or his apostles, the imputation of *guilt*, in being the occasion of such divisions.

I notice these instances merely to show, that the conduct of an individual may be the occasion of good or ill effects, without furnishing any proof of his innocence or guilt. Indeed the conduct of a person is, sometimes, *innocently* the occasion of much evil, and *criminally* the occasion of much good.

It is proper here to state, that Mr. W. has often observed, publicly and privately, that he was willing the church and society in Brooklyn should enjoy their opinions upon the Trinity, undisturbed by any efforts on his part to the contrary, provided they would grant *him* the peaceable enjoyment of his opinions, without endeavouring to bring him into reproach for his supposed errors.

While particular persons were diligently employed in endeavouring to produce uneasiness and disaffection in the minds of others, on account of his change of sentiments, he always considered himself at liberty to declare his views, and give his reasons occasionally, both publicly and privately. From the time he altered his opinions, he had seldom introduced his peculiar sentiments into his public discourses, or conversed upon them privately, except when the subject was introduced by others, or circumstances required an apology for opinions that were supposed to be dangerous; and he never felt nor manifested the least reluctance in communing with his Trinitarian brethren, but, on the contrary, uniformly declared his disposition and readiness to commune with them, on all occasions.

stances considered, they wish, or think it best, or not, that my ministerial relation to this religious society should be dissolved?*

“2. Will you unite with me in calling a mutual and impartial Council, to determine, from a full representation and view of our situation, whether it is proper and best, that I should be dismissed from my relation to you as a Christian minister; with this condition, nevertheless, that such a Council shall give their opinion with respect to several things to be hereafter noted; to the correctness of which opinion, both with respect to these things, and the event of my dismissal, all concerned, as far as it respects their *conduct*, shall subscribe and be satisfied?†

“I will now note the several things above referred to.

“1. That it be submitted to the opinion of the Council, whether it was proper, that the vote of the church, February 16th, viz. ‘The doctrine of the Trinity is an essential or fundamental doctrine’—should pass and be continued, considering the circumstances attending it, without their explaining, when repeatedly called upon, whether it was meant, or not, to be considered, in its application, as essential to Christian fellowship, or communion at the Lord’s table.

“2. That it be submitted to the Council, whether it was a suitable and justifiable conduct towards a pastor, for the church (or, more properly, their committee) to make the statement which they did, with the circumstances accompanying it, before the Council convened the 1st of

* Mr. W. wished to ascertain what proportion of the church and society were in favour of his dismissal, that when the Council should take up the subject, they might be furnished with necessary information to form a proper Result.

† Some were solicitous to know what was meant by subscribing and being satisfied. Mr. W. explained, and was willing to have his explanation reduced to writing. His meaning was, that all should agree to conform in practice to the judgment of the Council, whatever might be their private opinions and feelings. If the Council should judge it expedient that Mr. W. be dismissed, all that wished his continuance were to make no difficulty, but be satisfied with the decision. If the Council should result in favour of his continuance, all who wished his dismissal were to cease their opposition upon such terms as the Council should direct. But they say, If the Council should not dismiss Mr. W. what shall we do? Must we commune with him in his error? The answer was, If the Council approve of your withdrawing from communion, you are at liberty to remain in your retirement. If they consider you irregular in withdrawing, you must return and commune in peace, or may take a regular dismission, and connect yourselves with those churches where you can enjoy communion with a good conscience. This was the explanation. Mr. W. also stated, that they might bring any complaint against him before the Council, that they wished, and that the Council should deem regular and proper.

May last, and requested by mutual agreement (as will be seen by the church records and letters missive) to advise us in our situation.

“3. That it be submitted to the Council, whether the conduct of the aggrieved brethren, in unitedly and openly withdrawing or retiring from our communion, as they did, was correct and justifiable, according to the terms of our covenant, and the rules of the gospel.

“4. That it be referred to the Council to determine, whether, in the event of my dismissal, (should that take place,) it is equitable and reasonable, or not, in view of all circumstances, that some pecuniary consideration, or what is in some way equivalent, should be made to me for the probable disadvantages that I may sustain, as to property, in consequence of such an event; and also to determine, if any consideration be judged reasonable, what, or how much it shall be.

LUTHER WILLSON.

“*Brooklyn, Sept. 3, 1816.*”

At a church meeting, Sept. 3, 1816—The above propositions were taken into consideration by the church.—There was much conversation: no vote passed, but to adjourn. The meeting was adjourned.

At the adjourned meeting, Sept. 14th—The members of the church who styled themselves the aggrieved, presented a written communication to the Rev. Mr. Willson, junior pastor, and to the brethren of the church. After considerable discussion and remark upon the communication, and the propositions to which it referred, the meeting by vote of the church was dissolved.

[The communication of the aggrieved brethren was as follows:]

“*To the Rev. LUTHER WILLSON, Junior Pastor of the Congregational Church in Brooklyn, and said Church.*

“We, the members of said church, who have been aggrieved by Mr. Willson’s change of sentiments, are happy to find a door opened by Mr. Willson’s communication to the church, and a method pointed out, which, if wisely pursued, will, we think, be the means of restoring peace and harmony to this church and people; and we fully agree with Mr. Willson, that proper measures ought to be

adopted for ascertaining the minds and feelings of this church and people in respect to his dismissal. And we do think the first step to be taken is, to see whether the church do approve or disapprove of Mr. Willson's sentiments; and, secondly, to see whether the church do or do not wish the pastoral relation to be dissolved. And, thirdly, we are willing, and think it will be for the peace of the society, and a proper measure, to refer it over to them to act upon in like manner. And, should it then become necessary, we agree, fourthly, with Mr. Willson, in his second proposition, to call in a Mutual Council to hear and determine on all matters of controversy existing between us, contained in the Rev. Luther Willson's communication of the 3d instant.

*Daniel Tyler,
Joseph Scarborough,
Benjamin Pierce,
Delano Peirce,
Jezaniah Sumner,*

*Moses Clark,
William Barrett,
Joel Scarborough,
David Prince.*

“Brooklyn, Sept. 14, 1816.”

This communication of the aggrieved, and the other, of an earlier date, June 10th, Mr. Willson, the junior pastor, and most of the brethren of the church, after due consultation, answered as follows :

“To the aggrieved Brethren of the Congregational Church in Brooklyn, viz. Daniel Tyler, Joseph Scarborough, Moses Clark, Jezaniah Sumner, William Barrett, David Prince, Joel Scarborough, Benjamin Pierce, Delano Pierce.

“We, the junior pastor, and brethren of said church, have thought it proper to furnish an answer to your two written communications, made to us at different times—the first, dated June 10th, 1816, and the other, the 14th of September.

“In your first communication you inform us, that ‘your minds being impressed with a sense of the present unhappy situation both of the church and society in this place, you thought it your indispensable duty to address us on the subject;’ and you address us as follows: ‘Having a

desire to follow the things that make for peace, we have endeavoured carefully to examine ourselves, and search after the path of duty. We are constrained to say, that we think it our duty to content ourselves, at present, with a quiet and peaceable retirement; for how can we commune together with such discordant sentiments, views and feelings? It is our earnest desire and prayer to God, that the Great Shepherd would pour out his spirit upon us, ministers and people, that we might be led to adopt such measures as shall be for the glory of God, and the good of his church and people in this place.'

"From what is above written, it appears, that you feel a very serious concern in view of difficulties that exist in this church and society; that you are desirous to follow the things that make for peace; and that, after a careful self-examination, and a deliberate inquiry for the path of duty, you are constrained to forsake our holy and sacramental communion.

"As to the course you have adopted, in withdrawing from us, we think you have misjudged. We think it evidently inconsistent with those solemn covenant engagements by which all the members of this church of Christ have 'promised, by the help of his Spirit, to walk with him and his church in all ways of holy communion and fellowship, and in due observance of all his ordinances, according to his will as revealed in his word.'

"When you speak of 'discordant sentiments, views and feelings,' as the occasion of your 'quiet and peaceable retirement,' we cannot suppose, that, by such a proceeding, you mean to criminate yourselves, or to declare to us, and to the world, your own faults. You cannot therefore but be sensible, that your communication, and practice in conformity to it, implicitly and publicly fix upon us, a weighty and indiscriminate censure; and the censure falls upon us, individually and collectively.

"The step that you have taken in withdrawing from us, according to our view of it, seems to declare to us, and to the world, that you cannot, with a good conscience, commune with us as persons actuated by Christian principles and feelings.

"We cannot, however, think, nor would we believe, that your views and feelings with respect to us, are really

such as the proceeding you have adopted seems to declare. And even suppose, (what, however, we do not admit to have been the fact,) that our sentiments were so erroneous, and our feelings and conduct such, as to render our Christian character unworthy of the charitable opinion of our brethren; still we do not think it agreeable to the order and rules of the Christian church, that any of them should actually withdraw from us, without previously making known to us their grievance, with a desire to have it removed, and peace restored; and without previously using their best endeavours to point out and correct our erroneous opinions, and to reclaim us from our faults.

“If any of us have fallen into dangerous error, or have in any way become disorderly, we deem it a sacred duty incumbent upon our brethren, and enforced by every principle of Christian tenderness and concern for our salvation, to employ their most serious efforts, with the hope of God’s blessing, in endeavouring to convince us of our errors, and to restore us from our wanderings, before they withdraw from our communion, or in any way declare us unworthy of their fellowship.

“Impressed with these sentiments in view of the case before us, in which you and we are all concerned; having a desire to follow the things that make for peace, and wherewith one may *edify* another; and praying that a spirit of truth, humility, and Christian benevolence, may influence the hearts and conduct of us all, we earnestly entreat you to return to our communion, in hope that we may walk together ‘as the children of God, heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ, if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.’ If you cannot be persuaded to return to our communion by our request and exhortation, as contained in this letter, we think it the best and most peaceable measure, and do now therefore propose to you, to refer this matter of difference between you and us, a matter of so much practical importance to the interest and tranquillity of this church, to a Mutual Council, agreeably to the third proposition of the junior pastor, contained in his communication to the church on the 3d of September. And we also think it proper and necessary, that we all agree to conform, in practice, to the decision of such a Council.

“Our attention is now called to your second communication, which has respect to several propositions, which were communicated to the church by the junior pastor for their approbation and concurrence, and which relate to the calling of a Mutual Council, to determine, from a full view of our situation, the propriety of his dismissal from his pastoral charge, or of his continuance with this people. We think it was well known to you, when the above-mentioned propositions were under your consideration, both from what appeared upon the face of them, and from the remarks of the junior pastor at the church meeting when they were presented, that his object in making them was, to agree upon a Council, which should give their opinion upon all important matters of difference existing in the church, and between the church, or the aggrieved brethren, and the said pastor; and which should ultimately decide with respect to his dismissal. And we think it was well understood by you, when you made your communication, that the object of the junior pastor, in his first proposition, was, that the church should agree with him, as far as they were capable of acting in the case, in adopting a proper method for ascertaining the minds and feelings of this church and society with respect to dissolving his pastoral relation; in order that a Council, when called to judge of our affairs, from knowing the sense of this people in regard to his ministerial character, might be able to judge correctly, as far as that knowledge should be important, of the propriety of his dismissal.

[The junior pastor thought it proper to refer the whole of his propositions relating to both church and society, first, to the church, for their approbation, hoping that they would approve of them, and then unite with him in referring them to the society, for them to act upon, as far as they were concerned, and their interest was connected with the church. This method of bringing the matter forward, though he may have misjudged, he thought most likely to give general satisfaction, and believed it would be most respectful and acceptable to the church.]

“It does not appear from your communication (and observations upon it at the last church meeting) that you are willing to express your minds in regard to calling a Council to terminate the divisions among us, until particular

questions which you proposed, relative to the junior pastor's dismissal, are determined by votes of the church and society; the decision of which questions, according to *your* view of the case, may, or may not, render a Council necessary; whereas, in *our* view, a Council is indispensably necessary, from what we already know of our situation, to terminate the difficulties in the church, unless our divisions are immediately healed among ourselves; an event exceedingly desirable, but which we see no good reason to expect at present. We are not able to discover, at present, a reasonable prospect of peace and tranquillity restored to the church in any other way, than by referring our differences to the advice and judgment of others. We therefore think it reasonable and best to adopt the propositions of the junior pastor, as to all points of difference that they contain, to be referred to a Council for their consideration and opinion; and also to abide by the decision of such Council; while, at the same time, we are entirely willing, and are ready to agree, that the aggrieved, and all concerned, should refer any propositions or questions that they may wish, with such reasons as they may please to offer in support of them, to the advice and judgment of said Council; provided, that all persons, whose characters may be implicated or impeached by such questions or propositions, may have a fair and full opportunity for their own defence.

“And we are farther willing that the communication of the junior pastor to the church be subject to any corrections or explanations that may be necessary, without materially affecting the substance; or that may render it more acceptable, and better adapted to the object in view. We cannot but think that, thus far, in regard to your second communication, you will be ready to meet us, as to all matters of difference that relate to the church, in referring them for a settlement to the decision of the Council proposed; and also in referring our proceedings as a church (as far as it may be necessary) to the society for their consideration and concurrence.

“We now offer some remarks upon the method you propose, for ascertaining the minds and feelings of this church and people with respect to the dismissal of the junior pastor.

“The method you propose, in reference to that object, may be seen from what follows, as it is expressed in your communication: ‘We do think the first step to be taken

is, to see whether the church do approve or disapprove of Mr. Willson's sentiments; and, secondly, to see whether the church do or do not wish the pastoral relation to be dissolved. And, thirdly, we are willing, and think it will be for the peace of the society, and a proper measure, to refer it over to them to act upon in like manner.' From this it is evident, that you are willing, and think it desirable, that the church and society should express their minds with respect to the junior pastor's dismissal; by two votes to determine the question—1. Do they approve or disapprove of his sentiments? 2. Do they wish, or not, his pastoral relation to be dissolved? And it does not appear that you are willing the church or society should show their minds upon the question of dismissal in any other way. Whether you consider it absolutely indispensable that this question should be acted upon and decided in this manner, rather than a different manner, or by one vote, which would decide the matter at once, must be left undetermined, until you make known to us your opinion upon this point. For ourselves, we can see no important or special objection to putting the question of dismissal at once to the church, and also to the society, (if they shall think it proper,) to each in their distinct capacity of acting upon it, agreeably to the terms of the junior pastor's first proposition, 'whether, *all circumstances considered*, they wish, or think it best, or not, that his ministerial relation to this religious society should be dissolved.'

"As to the terms to be used in proposing the question, we have no wish, nor is it proper for us, to be particular; to decide, or to insist. But we can see no substantial reason for determining it by two votes rather than one; for every person acting upon the single question, *for* or *against* the junior pastor's dismissal, will consider with himself, how much he approves or disapproves of his religious opinions; and, in connexion with other circumstances, will undoubtedly give that consideration all its importance before he acts. It ought not, however, to be here omitted, that there are some reasons, in *our* view, why the first question contained in your proposal, the question in regard to approving or disapproving of Mr. Willson's sentiments seems to be improper. 1. It seems to be improper, inasmuch as it makes it necessary for every person who acts upon it, to declare to the world, by his

vote, his religious opinion upon the difficult doctrine in dispute; and he must, therefore, in consequence of his act, be held up to publick observation, as an object of approbation or censure, according to the different sentiments and feelings of different sects. We cannot suppose that people, in general, would be willing to have their religious opinions brought into publick view, as a subject of speculation among the curious and inquisitive, in that way. And should such a proceeding be adopted, we are inclined to think it would be new and unprecedented. 2. There is another objection to the method you propose, which we think more worthy of consideration, and which has respect, particularly, to members of the church. Should any members of the church be in agreement with the junior pastor as to the doctrine, which is considered by some an occasion of offence, you see at once, that such members must be prevented from acting upon the question, when it is put to the brethren—Do you approve or disapprove of Mr. Willson's sentiments? or otherwise, by expressing their approbation of his opinions, they are immediately exposed to the censure and discipline of the church, (not, in *our* opinion, by the authority of the church covenant, but by a vote of the church, last February, upon the doctrine of the Trinity.) Should these members (if there be any such) openly approve of Mr. Willson's sentiments, they will be liable to be called to an account for their errors, to be charged with heresy, and, if not reclaimed, to be excommunicated from the church. These, we think, are important reasons against adopting the method you propose. We hope you will agree with us, as we are concerned for the peace and happiness of this religious society, in calling a Council upon the terms proposed; and in submitting, in point of practice, to the authority of their decision.

*Luther Willson,
Roger W. Williams,
John Parish,
John Williams,
Daniel Davison,
Joseph Davison,
Benjamin Gilbert,
William Trescott,*

*Aaron Davison,
Simeon Butts,
Philip Scarborough,
Nathaniel Williams,
Wyllis Copeland,
Perrin Scarborough,
John G. Dabney,
George Lincoln.*

“*Brooklyn, Sept. 21, 1816.*”

“Brooklyn, September 23, 1816.

“*To the aggrieved Brethren of the Congregational Church
in Brooklyn.*

“I am disposed to offer you a few particulars in connexion with what is communicated by me and several brethren of the church. I think I am willing to make a personal sacrifice of interest and feelings, from a regard to the welfare of this church and society. I am ready, for myself, to strike out the last of my propositions, the one relative to a pecuniary consideration, from the idea that that proposition, though you have not suggested it, may possibly have some influence upon your minds, as to accepting the whole of them. I am willing also to erase the first, which you were anxious to have struck out at the time my communication was made; provided, that you will agree to all the others. As I agreed to erase the first, when the matter was conversed upon at the church meeting, so I am willing now to agree, if you choose it, that either or both of them should be struck out on the above condition, together with the condition, that our agreement with respect to a Council to determine the propriety of my dismissal, (should such an agreement take place,) be referred to the society for their consideration and concurrence; or for them to act upon, as they shall judge proper. And if there is any doubt in your minds, from what is contained in my propositions, whether I wish the Council proposed, to have power given them to dissolve my pastoral relation, if they shall think it best that my dismissal take place; I now declare to you explicitly, that I wish the Council to have full power given them for that purpose, provided they judge it proper and best that I be dismissed.

“I would farther observe, *particularly*, (though I think it manifestly implied in the joint communication of me and the brethren,) that I wish, as it respects myself, and hope it is understood and intended by all concerned, (if a Council be called,) that the aggrieved should have an equal voice in the choice of a Council; and that they should make a full representation of all their complaints, as far as may be consistent, in the opinion of the Council, with order and propriety.

“I have noted and forwarded these particulars, that, as far as I am capable of considering the case, I might

remove from your minds every plausible or imaginable objection to the Council proposed for the settlement and termination of our difficulties.

“LUTHER WILLSON.”

Nearly two weeks after these communications, a church meeting was appointed, with the expectation of receiving an answer from the aggrieved brethren,* and with the hope of making arrangements for a Mutual Council, to whose decision all concerned would *practically* conform. But in this we were disappointed. At the time the church were to meet, the aggrieved brethren appeared, and objected to the meeting, on the ground that no member of the church was a suitable person to preside as moderator. It was respectfully stated by Mr. W. and those that were in communion with him, that they would agree upon either of the aggrieved brethren to act as moderator. They had no doubt that several of them were suitable persons to preside on the occasion. Some of them were named, but they would not consent. Deacon Scarborough, an officer of the church, was chosen; and, by way of apology for refusing the appointment, he was so ingenuous as seriously to acknowledge himself a *party man*;† and, for that reason, thought it improper for him to preside at the meeting. In consequence of the determination of the aggrieved not to be satisfied with any individual of the church to officiate as moderator, the meeting was deferred, and a neighbouring minister was agreed upon to perform a duty, for which no member of the church was thought qualified. The gentleman, being specially detained, did not (as was expected) come at the time. The meeting was still deferred. Another gentleman was agreed on as moderator, (named by the aggrieved,) and came at the time appointed, agreeably to request.

* The aggrieved brethren made no reply to these communications, either verbally or in writing.

† It had been thought by many, that this gentleman had been much under the influence of *party spirit* for a considerable time; but he never was so frank as to avow it before. A *party man* I suppose to be one who is actuated by private and partial views; who has more of worldly wisdom, than of “wisdom from above,” one characteristic of which is, *without partiality*; and whose virtues as a Christian consist principally in zeal for a separate and purer communion, in opposition to the peace and unity of the church.

“ At a church meeting, October 16th, 1816,

Rev. ERASTUS LEARNED, *Moderator*, and
Rev. LUTHER WILLSON, *Clerk*,

The moderator opened the meeting with prayer.

“ After attending to written communications from the aggrieved brethren to Mr. Willson, the junior pastor, and the brethren of the church, and from him and the brethren of the church to the aggrieved, the following question was put: ‘ Will this church now proceed, with the aggrieved brethren, to choose a Mutual Council to hear and determine upon all matters of difficulty relative to the connexion of the junior pastor of this church, and to dissolve his connexion with the church, if said Council judge it expedient; and to give their advice relative to all matters of difficulty in the church?’

“ Voted in the negative.*

“ Another question was then put: ‘ Will this church now proceed, with the aggrieved brethren, to choose a Mutual Council to hear and determine upon all matters of difficulty relative to the connexion of the junior pastor of this church with said church, provided the society concur in calling said Council; and provided said Council, on a whole view of the subject, judge it best that the junior pastor’s pastoral relation should be dissolved, that they dissolve the same; and that said Council should take up all matters stated in the Rev. Luther Willson’s and the members of the church’s several communications to the aggrieved, which communications shall be the basis of the articles to be submitted to said Council; and all other matters which the aggrieved wish to lay before said Council, shall also be attended to by said Council?’

“ Voted in the affirmative.

* There were two material objections to this motion. 1. In contemplating the event of Mr. W.’s dismissal, it contained no reference to the society, as having any interest or agency in calling the Council. And, 2, as to difficulties in the church, it made provision only for the advice of a Council, without requiring the parties to conform to their decision. The church had already learnt by experience, that advice, however seasonable and useful, was not always respected. They had seen that individuals, who were anxious to be advised to the best method of removing difficulties and restoring peace, were sometimes the first to disregard the advice that was given. The church, therefore, had no expectation that difficulties in the church would be settled, unless the parties would agree, at least as it respected practice, to waive their private interests, and comply with the Result.

“The names being called for, they were taken, and were as follow :

In the affirmative.

John Williams,
Roger W. Williams,
Daniel Davison,
Wyllis Copeland,
Aaron Davison,
John Parish,
Benjamin Gilbert,
Philip Scarborough,
Perrin Scarborough,
Nathaniel Williams,
Simeon Butts,
William Trescott,
George Lincoln.

In the negative.

Joseph Davison,
Delano Pierce,
Joseph Scarborough,
Daniel Tyler,
William Barrett,
Jezaniah Sumner,
Moses Clark,
William Dabney.

Neutral.

John G. Dabney.

“Voted, that the meeting be dissolved. It was accordingly dissolved.

“Attest, L. WILLSON, Clerk.”*

[The aggrieved brethren voted upon each question.]

The aggrieved brethren appeared much disappointed at the result of this meeting. But they had no plausible or possible ground of complaint; for, so far as the business of the meeting depended upon the moderator, they had been favoured with one of their own choice.† They would not, however, unite with the church in calling a Council upon the terms proposed. Protesting against the conduct of the church in offering them a Mutual Council upon the principles contained in the vote, they soon entered upon measures which they expected would be effectual to remove Mr. W. from his ministerial and pastoral office.‡

* This record was transmitted to Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor; but has never been put upon the book of records. Many proceedings of the church since that date have been recorded; but the proceedings of this meeting, for reasons which I know not, have been omitted.

† To prevent misapprehension, I will note, that the church and pastor, without objection, concurred in the choice of the moderator, though he was nominated by the aggrieved; And I would also observe, that the moderator, in the performance of his duty, gave general, and, I believe, entire satisfaction. The reason of mentioning the moderator as one of their *own choice*, is that they appeared determined not to agree upon any one to preside at the meeting, that was not of their nomination.

‡ As all attempts to agree upon a Mutual Council, by whose decision the parties should be bound, had now failed; and as several attempts had been made at different

In about five or six weeks, their movements were again manifest. Private meetings, which had been occasionally

times by Mr. W. and his opponents to agree upon the men that should compose the Council, I think it proper to state several offers made by Mr. W. and the principle on which he was willing to agree that the Council should be chosen: As the proposition for calling a Council contemplated the event of Mr. W.'s dismissal, and as his future prospects, in the character of a Christian minister, might essentially depend upon the Result, he claimed it as a matter of right, to have an equal voice with his opponents in choosing the Council. Mr. W. has ever considered his proposals as to the choice of a Council unquestionably fair and liberal, and even more so than strict justice on his part required.

Mr. W. uniformly declared his readiness to agree upon the Council that ordained him, i. e. the ministers of the churches to which letters were sent at the time of his ordination, and such delegates as they might choose. This Council was expressly declared Trinitarian by the Rev. Mr. Dow, and the committee of the church, in their statement before the Ecclesiastical Council called to give their advice in May preceding. Says the statement, "He [Mr. W.] was ordained by a Trinitarian Council." The Rev. gentlemen that belonged to the Ordaining Council were as follow :

Rev. Dr. Whitney, of Brooklyn, Conn.
 Dr. Sumner, of Shrewsbury, Mass.
 Dr. Lee, of Lisbon, Conn.
 Mr. Pope, of Spencer, Mass.
 Mr. Atkins, of Killingly, Conn.
 Mr. Fiske, of New-Braintree, Mass.
 Mr. Williams, of Dudley, Mass.
 Mr. Whipple, of Charlton, Mass.
 Mr. Fisher, of Windham, Conn.
 Mr. Nelson, of Leicester, Mass.

A letter was sent to the second church in Canterbury, Conn. of which the Rev. Mr. Learned is pastor. A delegate from that church was present at the ordination; the pastor was not.

In the choice of the Ordaining Council, the church exercised an equal right with the pastor elect. To the calling of this Council the aggrieved brethren would not agree.

Mr. W. further proposed, that the aggrieved brethren should name a particular number of ministers, of such principles and character as they might choose; and that he would name an equal number, and then they would agree upon the chairman. He also proposed, that the chairman should be a known Trinitarian; but liberal in his views of communion. He was willing to agree upon a Trinitarian of the same general character with the Rev. Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor of the church in Brooklyn, or the Rev. Dr. Lathrop, of West-Springfield. Mr. W. was aware of the difficulty of fixing upon any gentleman precisely of this stamp. But he considered the proposal on his part altogether liberal, and was ready seriously to join in selecting one as nearly of that character as could be found. Among others, Mr. W. mentioned the Rev. Dr. Puffer, of Berlin, and the Rev. Mr. Doggett, of Mendon, Mass.; gentlemen with whom he had no personal acquaintance, who had been named by a respectable orthodox clergyman in Connecticut, and who, he thought, upon inquiry, would be ascertained to be of the principles and character desired. The latter of these gentlemen had also been frequently mentioned with respect by one of Mr. W.'s principal opposers. But no agreement was effected. At length the Rev. Mr. Pope, of Spencer, Mass. was named, by a friend and cotemporary of his at college, a leading member of the church in opposition to Mr. W. Mr. W. immediately agreed that Mr. P. should be the man. The gentleman, however, after a moment's reflection and consultation with his associates, concluded not to agree upon Mr. Pope as chairman of the Council. What possible objection there could be to Mr. P. who is particularly esteemed among the orthodox for his amiableness and good sense, as well as integrity and soundness in the faith, I am unable to conjecture. In every attempt to agree upon a Council, the opposers of Mr. W. would consent to no gentleman as chairman, but an individual, who, they were satisfied, considered a belief in the doctrine of the Trinity essential to Christian fellowship.

frequent in the course of the season, but for a time had been discontinued, were again revived. These meetings were favourable for maturing their plans, and making their arrangements. Some of the brethren who had appeared neutral and undecided, and others who had continued in communion with Mr. W. and who had approved of his propositions, (but were somewhat anxious on account of his change of opinion,) were frequently and earnestly solicited to attend their meetings, and, I may well suppose, to assist in concerting measures for the discipline or removal of their pastor. Several were, at length, induced to join them. Thus they continued their efforts, until they probably obtained a majority of individuals, active and efficient members of the church, to come into their measures. About the middle of December, a charge of heresy was prepared, and one of their number was appointed at a private meeting (as it afterwards appeared) to present it to Mr. W. He however presented it as an individual, without any intimation or appearance of others' concurring. The charge was as follows:

“You, Rev. Sir, are charged with departing from the faith once delivered to the saints, by denying the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, which I consider as a great and dangerous heresy, of which I entreat you as a Christian brother to repent and make retraction.

WILLIAM BARRETT.

“Brooklyn, Dec. 17th, 1816.

“*To the Rev. Luther Willson.*”

This charge was handed by Mr. B. without any introductory observations. It was attentively read by Mr. W. After reading it, he observed, that he supposed nothing would give satisfaction, but a renunciation of what was considered his error, and an acknowledgment of his heresy, as stated in the charge. Mr. W. stated to Mr. B. that he should be glad to agree with him in opinion, if he could consistently with the convictions of his own mind. Mr. B. thought it unnecessary to enter into any conversation upon the subject, as they had repeatedly conversed upon it before. He proposed to Mr. W. the only terms of reconciliation. Mr. W. wished them to be committed

to writing, that he might take them into consideration, and give him an answer the next day. Mr. B. consented.

“Brooklyn, December 18th, 1816.

“In explanation of my views relative to a charge made by me against the Rev. Luther Willson, contained in my communication to him, dated December 17th, I now state to him the only conditions which will afford reconciliation and satisfaction to me, and render the charge of no effect against the said Willson; which conditions are as follow, viz. That he, the said Willson, shall agree with the church in calling a Council for his dismissal, and be dismissed, or shall repent, and make retraction of his great and dangerous heresy, which is specified in the above-mentioned charge.

WILLIAM BARRETT.”

Mr. W. upon deliberate reflection, could not comply with the conditions. Every person will judge for himself of the reasonableness and propriety of such conditions at any time, and, especially, held out to a pastor by a Christian brother after presenting him with the charge of heresy. But he probably had his instructions; and if there was any thing wrong in the affair, it must be placed to the account of his brethren, who privately appointed him to bring forward the charge.

After some days, Mr. B. with two of the brethren, visited Mr. W. to take what was called the second step, pointed out in the 18th of Matthew. Mr. B. at the first of his interview with Mr. W. called upon them to witness his charge of heresy. It appeared, that the brethren considered it the only business of their visit to be witnesses of the charge against their pastor. Mr. W. having expressed his opinion, that it was always the duty of the complainant who felt himself injured, first to labour with his offending brother to convince him of his error or offence, and also the duty of those whom he should take with him, to join in the friendly office of admonition, one of them, apparently in doubt as to the obligation that was upon him, entered into conversation with Mr. W. upon the subject. The other continued silent, considering it his only concern to be a witness of the charge of his brother B. As the brethren were about to take their leave, Mr. W. observed, that if they considered it a Christian duty to hear the apology of

the accused for his supposed error, and to use their endeavours to reclaim him, he wished for another interview, that he might lay before them his reasons in full for the opinion that was deemed heretical, and that he might have opportunity to hear them upon a subject which they considered of the greatest importance. They left him, apparently undetermined as to their duty in the case: they did not, however, think proper to visit him again.

Mr. B. a few days after, handed Mr. W. the following complaint, addressed to the church:

“To the Church of Christ in Brooklyn.”

“BRETHREN AND BELOVED,

“The subscriber would lay before you the following complaint, viz. That the Rev. Luther Willson, colleague pastor of this church, has departed from the faith once delivered to the saints, by denying the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, declaring it to be his prevailing opinion, both in publick and private, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of God, is not in his own nature, as a divine person, equal and eternal with the Father, the supreme and self-existent God; which sentiment we consider as an essential error, so essential, that we can no longer, in conscience, sit under his administration. The first and second steps have been taken in order to reclaim him, agreeable to the 18th of Matthew, but without producing the desired effect. This is therefore to request this church to take due cognizance of the same, and to take proper measures for the Rev. Luther Willson to be brought to trial, where evidence of the above charge may be exhibited, and a regular decision obtained.*

WILLIAM BARRETT.

“Brooklyn, Dec. 28th, 1816.”

* It is worthy of note, that this brother, in telling his complaint to the church, (though it never reached any church, except the Consociation,) began in the singular, and at length became plural. The subscriber first appeared as an individual. When he had reached the middle of his complaint, he became *we*: “which sentiment,” he says, “*we* consider an essential error, so essential, that *we* can, in conscience, no longer sit under his administration.” I shall here undertake to account for this change from singular to plural.—The probable method of accounting for the plural pronoun *we*, is the habit of this brother and his companions, of saying *we* at their private meetings, where individuals acting in concert, and composing one body, were probably identified in the complaint. The complainant, in company with his brethren, being accustomed to say *we* on these occasions, it was not strange that, in copying or making out his communication to the church, he should begin in the singular, imperceptibly become plural, and then again return to the singular, and subscribe the complaint as an individual.

After reading the complaint, which was handed on Saturday, Mr. W. inquired of Mr. B. whether he wished to have it communicated to the church the next day. Mr. B. observed, that as to that he might do as he pleased. After a moment's reflection, Mr. B. preferred that it should not be communicated at that time. It appeared from circumstances, that Mr. B. furnished Mr. W. with the complaint, to apprise him of his intention soon to lay it before the church for their consideration.

The same day that the complaint was received, Mr. W. had put into his hands by Roger W. Williams, a deacon of the church, the following appointment of a church meeting :

“ To Brother Roger W. Williams, a member of the Church of Christ in Brooklyn.

“ You are hereby notified, that there will be a meeting of the church held at the meeting-house on Tuesday, the 31st instant, at one o'clock, P. M. to hear and consider the subject matter of complaint brought by brother Barrett against the Rev. Luther Willson for heresy, and to adopt such measures as may then be thought proper.*

“ JOSEPH SCARBOROUGH,
Deacon of said Church.

“ Brooklyn, Dec. 27th, 1816.”

The same day on which the complaint and notification were put into the hands of Mr. W. Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, who did not, at that time, attend publick worship, sent for Mr. W. the junior pastor, to call at his house, that he might inform him of the wish of several members of the church, that he, (the junior pastor,) after

* It is observable, that Dea. Joseph Scarborough, in his notification to Dea. Roger W. Williams, addressed him as a brother, and not as an officer of the church. What could be the reason of this? Was it possible for Dea. S. at the moment he wrote this, to be so under the influence of unchristian feelings, as intentionally to insinuate, by neglecting to give the person notified his proper title, that he was unworthy of his office in the church? Was it mere accident or inadvertence? Or could he suppose it a more affectionate mode of address to one with whom he had not been disposed to commune for about six months? Or did he, in fact, possess so much sensibility and delicacy, in assuming to himself the power of appointing a church meeting, as to feel the impropriety of sending out a formal notification to an officer in the church of the same rank with himself; and therefore, to give himself an air of superiority suited to the authority he had assumed, think it proper, in the notification, to address Dea. W. as a brother, and in signing it, to subscribe *himself* as an officer, as deacon of the church?

the exercises of the sabbath, the next day, should appoint a meeting of the church, to be held on Tuesday, at one o'clock; the same time stated in the notification of Dea. S. Dr. W. observed, that the business of the meeting he did not know; of that he had not been informed. Mr. W. then presented him the notification signed officially by Dea. Scarborough, of prior date, containing the appointment of a meeting at the same time, and stating the business of the meeting. Mr. W. supposed one notification to be sufficient, if it was regular and official, as it claimed to be. He was therefore unwilling to interfere, unless the senior pastor should direct the meeting to be publicly warned on the sabbath. Mr. W. observed, that he was willing to mention publicly the request that had been made to Dr. W. without taking upon himself the responsibility of appointing a meeting. The senior pastor, appearing somewhat embarrassed at the officiousness of the good deacon, said to Mr. W. that on the whole he must do as he thought proper.

Accordingly Mr. W. after the publick exercises of the sabbath, stated what had been communicated to him by the senior pastor, read the notification signed by Dea. Scarborough, and observed, that he should not presume to interfere with the appointment of Dea. S. which claimed to be official, and was of earlier date. He also observed, that, in view of all circumstances, the brethren of the church would probably meet at the time specified in the notice of Dea. S.

At the time appointed for the meeting, the brethren of the church were generally together, and a neighbouring clergyman had come, at the request of Dea. Scarborough, to perform the duty of moderator, if a meeting should be held, and he should be requested by the church. The business was thus far planned and executed by Dea. S. and the aggrieved brethren with a fair prospect of success. This worthy gentleman and his associates probably considered themselves the *true church*, and therefore thought it proper for them privately to know each other's minds, and to make what arrangements they pleased; and, no doubt, considered it the duty of others readily to conform to them, not attempting in any way to impede the progress of their pious and benevolent designs. But, unreasonable

and unchristian as it may seem, when the brethren of the church came together, some members were not altogether satisfied with appearances; and they even had the *presumption* (if I may be allowed the use of so strong a term) to call in question the regularity of the meeting, and to inquire into the authority of Dea. S. to appoint a church meeting, and call in a moderator, without the knowledge and concurrence of the church, the pastors, or the other deacon. They thought it contrary to usage, and an extraordinary assumption for a junior deacon (junior in office, though senior in age) to take it upon himself, unsolicited by the church, or any of its officers, officially to appoint a church meeting for the important purpose of dealing with a pastor for heresy, or of referring him over to the higher powers. It will also be recollected that this gentleman, who now seemed to have upon him, unrequested, the care of the whole church, less than three months before, openly declared himself a *party man*, and consequently an unsuitable person to preside as moderator, when chosen by the church. But the motives and feelings of men sometimes change, as well as their opinions; and those that were once the most partial, may soon become the most disinterested and most unwearied in their exertions for the common good, and consequently most entitled to the respect and confidence of their brethren.

It may appear to some absolutely inexcusable, and an indelible mark of reproach, in the conduct of a pastor, to be seen among the number that should object to the regularity of a meeting, warned by a *deacon* without the consent of the church, or any other of its officers; but truth and justice require, that facts should be impartially stated; and it was a fact, that Mr. W. the junior pastor, with others, objected to the regularity of the meeting, considering the circumstance of its notification. He also was so uncandid and imprudent, as seriously to declare his suspicion of particular management on the part of the *aggrieved brethren*, at their private meetings, to ascertain, by a previous knowledge of the minds of individuals, that a majority of the brethren, who would attend a publick meeting, were prepared to sanction by vote, any thing that individuals of their number might propose.

The aggrieved brethren appeared extremely anxious to have the meeting formed by calling in the clergyman before-mentioned, then at the house of the senior pastor, to preside. Mr. W. objected, at the same time declaring himself willing to have a meeting appointed to be held the next day, or at any time that would be most agreeable to the brethren;* and he had no objection to the Rev. gentleman, invited by Dea. Scarborough, as moderator.

The meeting not being formed, and the members of the church conversing with considerable freedom one with another, Mr. W. requested liberty of his brother Barrett (who, according to arrangements, was soon to appear his accuser before the church) to ask him a question. Mr. B. readily consented. As soon as he had consented, and the question was about to be proposed, several of his brethren, Dea. S. and others, (who were particularly discerning, and whose attention was always awake, when there was a possibility of being exposed to their disadvantage,) immediately discovered great uneasiness, and warmly opposed Mr. W.'s putting *any* question to Mr. B. and disapproved of Mr. B.'s consenting to hear it. This circumstance only tended to confirm Mr. W. in the suspicion, that there was something undiscovered, that would not appear so well upon examination before the publick, as it did in a more private circle, where all were more of one accord and one mind. He therefore insisted upon putting the question to Mr. B. as he had consented to hear it, and as it was no interruption to any business before the church; observing, at the same time, that Mr. B. was at liberty to answer it, or not, as he pleased. Mr. W. observed, that if any members of the church chose not to hear the question proposed publicly, he would go aside with Mr. B. and propose it in the presence of only two or three of the brethren. The aggrieved, notwithstanding, were so highly offended at his determination to ask Mr. B. a question aside in the presence of a few of the brethren, and at his going aside with Mr. B. for that purpose, that they left

* The reason why Mr. W. objected to the meeting being held at the time, and wished it to be deferred until the next, or some future day, (though it was not then stated,) was the probability of obtaining a knowledge of circumstances, that might prevent the success of a plan, formed, as he had reasons to suspect, privately and dishonourably, for the accomplishment of a particular purpose.

the meeting-house with much clamour and confusion, accused Mr. W. of breaking up the meeting, and proclaimed him a very disorderly man.

Mr. W. claiming an obligation on the part of Mr. B. to hear his question, according to his consent, they went out together, and, in the presence of others that were with them, Mr. W. said to Mr. B. "Was the charge of heresy, that you presented me, made out at a previous meeting of a number of brethren of the church?" Mr. B.'s answer was, "Yes." Mr. W. then inquired, "whether these brethren agreed to support the charge of heresy against him?" Mr. B. replied, "I suppose it was so." Mr. W. further inquired, "Who were the individuals that thus agreed?" To this inquiry he could obtain no answer. Several of the aggrieved brethren had become so disturbed, that Mr. B. thought it not prudent to answer again. Individuals, however, observed, that all that were present concurred in it, that they wished nothing private, that they were willing the world should know of their proceedings.*

From these and other circumstances, Mr. W. obtained evidence, satisfactory to himself, that Mr. B. though he presented the charge and complaint, as an individual, was actually appointed for this purpose, at a private meeting, by the aggrieved brethren; and also to bring his complaint before the church, when they should have completed their arrangements by a private and mutual understanding, so as to secure the concurrence of a major part of the church in any measure that an individual of their number might propose. By this well-concerted plan, Mr. B. in due time, was to bring forward his complaint; and those who had fitted him out upon this business, given him instructions, and pledged him their co-operation and support, were to take up the subject of complaint, when it should come before the church, as if it were before them for the first time; and, as impartial and disinterested persons, were to suggest and adopt such methods of proceeding, as should be thought necessary and proper. In this way, I have no doubt, they expected to obtain the sanction of the church in calling the Consociation of Windham County to try and condemn their junior pastor for heresy.

* After the affair was out, and could no longer be concealed, they were much more willing than they were before.

In about an hour after the members of the church withdrew from the meeting-house, two of the aggrieved brethren, with the Rev. Mr. Day, of Killingly, (the gentleman invited by Dea. S.) called upon Mr. W. to know, whether he wished a church meeting; stating, that if he did, they would agree upon the time, and have one appointed. Mr. W. observed, that it was not for him to determine; that he had no business before the church, unless his accuser, or accusers, wished him to appear. If they wished a meeting appointed, he had no objection. He was ready to appoint one, and to answer to the complaint of heresy; only he wished the meeting to be regularly warned, and the business of it particularly stated. Being asked what he would consider a regular warning, he replied, if Dr. W. the senior pastor, would prepare a notification, he would read it publickly on the sabbath, and would consider it as altogether proper and regular; and he was willing to agree, that the Rev. Mr. Day be moderator.

Two of the brethren (not of the aggrieved) being at the house of Mr. W. when these gentlemen called, entered into conversation with them upon the subject, and they mutually agreed, as I understood from hearing their conversation, to have a meeting in about twenty days, (the day of the meeting was named,) and that the Rev. Mr. Day should preside as moderator. The reason of its being deferred so long was to accommodate individuals who wished to attend the meeting, and who must necessarily be absent on business or journeys, previously arranged, during that time.

After two or three days, Mr. W. received the following communication.

“ To the Rev. Luther Willson, Junior Pastor of Christ’s Church in Brooklyn.

“ We, who are members of said church, having seriously reflected upon the discordant spirit exhibited at our church meetings, (especially at the last that was attempted,) are of opinion, that they do not make for peace, nor the honour of religion, therefore have no desire to have another, unless you wish for one; and if you wish to have another, we are willing to have one under the following restrictions *only*, viz. That it be held by the middle of next

week, and warned solely for the purpose of considering Mr. Barrett's complaint of heresy against the Rev. Luther Willson; and that the Rev. Israel Day be nominated as moderator in the warning, as agreed.

“JOSEPH SCARBOROUGH,
in behalf of the aggrieved Brethren.

“*Dated Brooklyn, Jan. 2, 1817.*”

Immediately upon receiving this, Mr. W. called upon Mr. B. who had put into his hands a complaint addressed to the church, to ascertain, if he were present, and concurred in the communication of Dea. S. in behalf of the aggrieved, and, also, if he wished a meeting appointed, that he might lay his complaint before the church. Mr. W. was particularly desirous of being informed what were his views and wishes in the case. Mr. B. furnished an answer in writing.

“BROOKLYN, JAN. 3, 1817.

“*To the Rev. Luther Willson.*

“SIR—My mind is, with regard to the communication handed to you by Capt. Tyler, that the charge may be brought before the Consociation, and not before the church, for a decision.
WILLIAM BARRETT.”

Mr. W. then replied to Dea. S.

“BROOKLYN, JAN. 3, 1817.

“*Dea. Joseph Scarborough,*

“I would briefly state, in answer to your communication of Jan. 2d in behalf of the aggrieved brethren, that, as you have no desire, on your part, for a church meeting, to take into consideration the complaint of heresy against me, and to have it acted upon by the church; but only proposed it as a matter of accommodation, with certain restrictions, if I should wish a meeting for that purpose; and as it is the mind of Mr. Barrett, the complainant, to lay the matter of charge, or complaint, immediately before the Consociation for decision, rather than refer it to the church; and as there is nothing mutual in the affair of referring the subject of complaint for a decision, but the business is pursued entirely by way of accusation, I have concluded not to warn a meeting, (and especially as you

do not desire one,) but to leave the matter entirely to my accuser, or accusers, to choose their own method of proceeding, and shall endeavour to meet the accusation as I may think proper, and occasion may require.

“LUTHER WILLSON.”

Five of the aggrieved brethren, styling themselves a committee, early in the month of January applied to the Rev. Dr. Welch, of Mansfield, to appoint a meeting of the Consociation of Windham County, to take cognizance of a complaint of heresy against the Rev. Luther Willson, their junior pastor.

“BROOKLYN, JAN. 8, 1817.

“*Rev. Moses C. Welch, D. D.*

“DEARLY BELOVED,

“Notwithstanding we have requested our beloved brother, Benjamin Pierce, to make known our case to you, yet we think it meet to state to you, that the difficulties in the church, occasioned by our junior pastor, the Rev. Luther Willson’s altering his sentiments in regard to the character of the second person in the Holy Trinity, have been increasing for about one year; and he yet persists in the belief that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not in his own nature equal and eternal with the Father, the self-existent God, notwithstanding the exertions of many to reclaim him; and especially, lately our beloved brother, William Barrett, has taken the steps pointed out in the 18th of St. Matthew; but he still remains unyielding: in consequence of which, Mr. Barrett has lodged a complaint, charging him, the said Rev. Luther Willson, of being guilty of heresy, ‘in departing from the faith once delivered to the saints, by denying the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of Jesus Christ,’ as you will see by the complaint herewith transmitted to you. This, therefore, is to request you, as moderator of the consociated churches in the county of Windham, to call out said Consociation, or any part of them that you may judge proper, agreeable to Saybrook Platform, as soon as may be convenient, to meet at the dwelling-house of Daniel Tyler, in said Brooklyn, to hear said complaint, evidences to support the charges,

and Mr. Willson's defence—and pass sentence thereon, agreeable to said Platform.

“We are, in the faith and fellowship of the gospel,

Joseph Scarborough,
Daniel Tyler,
Jezaniah Sumner,
Benjamin Pierce,
Moses Clark,

} A Committee for
the purpose of
applying to
the Consociation.”*

“The above and foregoing is a true copy of the original communication from the aggrieved brethren in the church in Brooklyn.

“Test,

MOSES C. WELCH.

“Mansfield, Sept. 13, 1817.”

The brethren that subscribed this communication speak of difficulties in the church, occasioned by Mr. W.'s change of sentiments, as having been increasing for about a year; and of his *persisting* in a belief which they considered a great error, notwithstanding the *exertions* of many to reclaim him. They mention, particularly, the steps taken by their *beloved brother*, William Barrett; and that, after *all the exertions of the many*, and especially of *this brother*, still their pastor remained *unyielding*. One would suppose, from this very affectionate and impressive representation, that, with great sincerity, and with patient and continued exertions, for nearly a year, many of the brethren had been labouring with their pastor to reclaim him from a *fundamental error*, and to prevent the increase of difficulties in the church.

I will here mention some facts, that may be considered in connexion with the representation contained in this letter.

These five brethren, calling themselves a committee, were the principal and most influential opposers of Mr. W.'s ministry. Three of the five, (one an officer of the church, and another a gentleman of publick and liberal education) in the course of this year, in which *so much* had been done to convince a pastor of his error, had never manifested a wish, nor sought an interview, to converse

* The brethren that made this communication, style themselves a *Committee*. Of what they were a committee I know not. But I will inform the publick, that they were not a committee of the church.

with him upon the subject in question; to inquire into the reasons that induced him to alter his sentiments, or to use their endeavours to convince him of his error.

Immediately after the vote of the church upon the doctrine of the Trinity in February, 1816, in which they concurred, Mr. W. expressly desired them to call upon him, that he might have opportunity to converse with them. But, anxious and earnest as they were for his recovery from unbelief, and for his spiritual welfare, they never thought it proper, either as *Christians* or *neighbours*, to regard his request. I will here remark, that after they withdrew from communion, the pastor called upon *them*, to ascertain their views and motives in withdrawing; and one of them (Dea. Joseph Scarborough) at a particular interview upon withdrawing from communion, after manifesting a decided disinclination as to conversing with the pastor, very soon overcoming his reluctance, with a latitude and occasional severity, not the most worthy of imitation, conversed with him freely. At this time, the opinions of the pastor, among other things, were a subject of remark and reproof. I think, however, it may be said with propriety, that his *opinions* were not in any respect a subject of *serious and candid discussion*. The conversation was very desultory, and related principally to circumstances adventitious and incidental.

Again it may be added, that Mr. Barrett, in taking what are called the regular steps of discipline according to the 18th of Matthew, was cautious, at his first interview with the pastor, when he presented the charge of heresy; and also at the second, when he came with two of his brethren; not to enter into conversation with him, in the way of discussion or admonition, upon the difference of opinion that existed between them. It is also a remarkable fact, that but two of the brethren that had appeared in opposition to the pastor (one of them Mr. B.) had ever addressed him in direct terms as chargeable with *heresy*, until application was made to the Consociation; and that comparatively few, not a fifth part of the brethren of the church, nor half the number of the aggrieved brethren, had ever *admonished* him of his error as *fundamental*. This is the zeal—these are the sincere, patient, and persevering exertions of *many* to reclaim a pastor from a fatal error. Alas! the *obsti-*

nacy, that could remain *unyielding*, that could *persist* in error, after the efforts of so *many*, and means so powerful, affectionate, and long continued, had been employed to remove it.

Copy of a Letter from Dr. Welch, to the junior pastor of the church in Brooklyn, citing him to appear before the Consociation, to answer to the "crime of heresy."

" WINDHAM, JAN. 16, 1817.

" *Rev. Luther Willson, Junior Pastor of the Church in Brooklyn.*

" SIR—On a charge against you for the 'crime of heresy, in departing from the faith once delivered to the saints, by denying the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of Jesus Christ,' application has been made that the Consociation of Windham County may be convened. A meeting of said Consociation will accordingly be had, at the house of Capt. Daniel Tyler, in said Brooklyn, on the first Wednesday in February next, at 10 o'clock, A. M. to hear and determine said case. You are therefore notified of said meeting of Consociation, that you may appear, and offer such plea and arguments in your defence as you may think proper.

MOSES C. WELCH, *Mod'r. of
the last meeting of Consociation.*"

The meeting of the Consociation was held at the time appointed.

The Consociation being organized, they adjourned to the meeting-house to attend to the business for which they were convened.

They met according to adjournment. A paper was then exhibited, containing a charge and complaint against the junior pastor of the church, and other things in connexion.

The following were the contents :

" Mr. Barrett's first charge is in the words following, viz.

' You, Rev. Sir, are charged with departing from the faith once delivered to the saints, by denying the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of the Lord Jesus Christ, which I consider as a great and dangerous heresy, of which I entreat you as a Christian brother to repent and make retraction.

WILLIAM BARRETT.

' *Brooklyn, Dec. 17th, 1816.*'

‘*Brooklyn, Dec. 18th, 1816.*

‘In explanation of my views relative to a charge made by me against the Rev. Luther Willson, contained in my communication to him, dated Dec. 17th, 1816, I now state to him the only conditions which will afford reconciliation and satisfaction to me, and render the charge of no effect against the said Willson; which conditions are as follow, viz. The said Willson shall agree with the church in calling a Council for his dismissal, and be dismissed, or shall repent, and make retraction of his great and dangerous heresy, which is specified in the above-mentioned charge.

WILLIAM BARRETT.’

‘*To the Church of Christ in Brooklyn.*

‘BRETHREN AND BELOVED,

‘The subscriber would lay before you the following complaint, viz. That the Rev. Luther Willson, colleague pastor of this church, has departed from the faith once delivered to the saints; by denying the doctrine of the Trinity, and the real proper deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, declaring it to be his prevailing opinion, both in publick and private, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is not, in his own nature, as a divine person, equal and eternal with the Father, the supreme and self-existent God; which sentiment we consider as an essential error,* so essential,

* “An essential error.” How essential? “So essential that we can no longer in conscience sit under his administration.” If this be a rule to determine that an error is essential, viz. the opinions and feelings of individuals, members of a church, who happen to be dissatisfied with a minister on account of his belief or disbelief of some particular doctrine—I have reason to apprehend, that, in almost every church, a few disaffected members would find it easy to procure the denunciation and dismissal of their pastor, provided they could find the *Consociation* of the same opinions and feelings with themselves. Thus a few members of a church, and the Consociation, may always find a reason for deposing a minister, of whom they disapprove, even if the church as a body are satisfied with his ministry; and the criterion, by which they determine his error to be essential, is not the authority of scripture, or the divine rule, but their own consciences.

The amount of it is this: If a minister believe what *I* believe, and preach the doctrine that *I* think to be true, he must be *sound in the faith*; the doctrine which he preaches is *essential truth*. If, on the contrary, he preaches what *I* cannot conscientiously hear, his doctrine cannot be true; his *error is essential*.

This is a remarkably easy method of determining when the *error* of a minister is *essential*. I can think of but one inconvenience in this method of determining an essential error. The inconvenience is this. Professing Christians have sometimes a great share of self-complacency, and are *extremely conscious* of the perfection of their *own knowledge*; and consequently by taking upon themselves very freely the inspection and oversight of others’ faith, they are apt to be troublesome to their more scrupulous and less confident brethren, who cannot see things so clearly, and who are sometimes so unfortunate as to differ from them in opinion.

that we can no longer, in conscience, sit under his administration. The first and second steps have been taken in order to reclaim him, agreeably to the 18th chapter of Matthew, but without producing the desired effect. This is therefore to request this church to take due cognizance of the same, and to take proper measures for the Rev. Luther Willson to be brought to trial, where evidence of the above charge may be exhibited, and a regular decision obtained.

‘WILLIAM BARRETT.

‘*Brooklyn, Dec. 28th, 1816.*’

‘BROOKLYN, JAN. 3, 1817.

‘*To the Rev. Luther Wilson,*

‘SIR—With regard to the communication handed to you by Capt. Tyler, it is my wish not to have a church meeting; but to bring the matter before the Consociation for a final decision.

WILLIAM BARRETT.’

“A true copy from the files of Consociation.

“S. P. WILLIAMS.”

The following was the Result of the Consociation :

“At a meeting of the Consociation of the County of Windham, regularly convened, in Brooklyn, at the house of Capt. Daniel Tyler, Feb. 5th, 1817, A. M. to hear and decide on a complaint against the Rev. Luther Willson, junior pastor of the first church in said place—

“The following elders and messengers of the churches, present :

From the church in North-Mansfield, Rev. Moses C. Welch, D. D. ;

Dea. Frederick Freeman.

First church in Woodstock, Rev. Eliphalet Lyman ;

Dea. Jedediah Kimball.

First church in Lebanon, Rev. Zebulon Ely ;

Broth. Joseph Leach.

Church in South Society, Killingly, Rev. Israel Day.

Second church in Ashford, Rev. William Storrs ;

Broth. Allen Bosworth.

First church in Hampton, Rev. Ludovicus Weld ;

Dea. Abijah Fuller.

First church in Thompson, Rev. Daniel Dow ;

Dea. Moses Bixby.

Second church in Canterbury, Rev. Erastus Learned ;

Broth. Asa Burgess.

First church in Canterbury, Rev. Asa Meach ;

Broth. Joseph Simms.

- (Presbyterian) church in Mansfield, Rev. Samuel P. Williams ;
Dea. Amasa Palmer.
- Second church in Woodstock, Rev. Alvan Underwood ;
Broth. John Perrin.
- Second church in Killingly, Rev. Roswell Whitmore ;
Dea. James Danielson.
- First church in Pomfret, Rev. James Porter ;
Dea. John H. Payson.
- Third church in Woodstock, Rev. Samuel Backus ;
Broth. Rensselaer Child.
- First church in Windham, Rev. Cornelius B. Everest ;
Dea. Charles Lee.
- Second church in Pomfret, ——— ; Dea. Amasa Storrs.
- North church in Canterbury, ——— ; Broth. Cornelius Adams.
- Church in Plainfield, ——— ; Dea. Abel Andross.
- Church in Voluntown, ——— ; Broth. Daniel Campbell.
- Church in Chaplin, ——— ; Broth. Joseph Martin.

“The Consociation being organized by the choice of the Rev. Moses C. Welch, D. D. Moderator, and the Rev. Messrs. Williams and Dow, Scribes, was opened with prayer by the moderator.

“Adjourned till half past one o'clock, P. M. to meet at the meeting-house. Met accordingly. Prayer by the moderator. A request was made by certain members of the church, by the junior pastor of the church and by a committee of the first ecclesiastical society in Brooklyn, respectively, to be heard by counsel.* Granted.

“On behalf of the members of the church at whose request the Consociation was convoked, a paper was exhibited, containing the charge of heresy against the Rev. Luther Willson, in denying the doctrines of the Trinity, and the proper deity of Jesus Christ ; a statement that the regular steps of discipline, prescribed by the Head of the Church in such cases, had been used to reclaim him, without success ; and also a request to the church to take proper measures to bring the offender to trial.

“It was then stated, that for this purpose the Consociation had been convened, before whom the complainant appeared, ready to substantiate his charge.

“Against proceeding to trial, it was objected on the part of the pastor, and also on the part of the society, that the Consociation have not jurisdiction in the case.

* Here is a mistake in point of fact, though undoubtedly unintentional. The Result is *not correct*, in stating that the society requested to be heard by counsel, The society had no counsel ; none appeared in their behalf but their committee.

“The society, in support of their objection, presented a narrative of the proceedings of the several parties concerned during the unhappy difficulties of the church.

“After a deliberate, and, as they trust, candid hearing, both of pastor and society, the Consociation came to the following Result:—It appears from the records of the church and the concessions of the parties, that the church in Brooklyn was originally and voluntarily consociated; that it has acknowledged this relation by a series of subsequent consociational acts; and that it has neither forfeited its privileges, or surrendered them. The constitution of the churches does not admit, that a consociated church may be deprived of its privileges by the act of its pastor, or of any association of pastors; but subjects the pastor of such church, no less than any other member, to its discipline. It supposes every person entering into connexion with such church, acquainted with its government, and solemnly covenanting to co-operate with it in carrying its system of discipline into effect. The Consociation, therefore, are unanimously of the opinion, not only that they have jurisdiction in the case, but are imperiously bound, since all the attempts to adjust the difficulties in the church by Mutual Council have proved abortive, to listen to its complaint,* and, in humble dependence on the Head of the Church, endeavour to restore it to peace.

“Adjourned till to-morrow, half past 8 o’clock, A. M.

“Feb. 6th—Met according to adjournment: attended to the minutes. Adjourned to the meeting-house: prayer by the moderator. Several members having been challenged by the accused, as having prejudged the case, were examined and acquitted.

“The Rev. Daniel Dow, having requested from motives of delicacy to be excused from acting in Council, had liberty to withdraw.

“The counsel for the complainant proceeded, after offering evidence that the regular steps had been taken, to support by testimony the charge set forth in the complaint. Adjourned till 2 o’clock. Met accordingly. Attended

* The Result, referring to the church, speaks of “its complaint.” To prevent misapprehension, I observe, that the *church* did not *authorize* the complaint. They had not seen it; nor had they any agency in calling the Consociation, or laying the complaint before them.

further to testimony. Adjourned for one hour. Met according to adjournment. Heard the accused at length in his own vindication, and the complainant by his counsel. Adjourned to the house of Capt. Tyler. Met accordingly. Deliberated on the case.

“Adjourned till half past 8 o'clock to-morrow morning.

“Feb. 7th—Met according to adjournment. Prayer by the moderator.

“The Consociation, having taken into serious consideration the whole subject submitted to their decision, agreed in the following result :

“*First.* That the charge against the Rev. Luther Willson of denying the proper deity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and consequently the mode of the divine subsistence revealed in the gospel, is supported.

“*Secondly.* That the denial of this doctrine is a departure from the faith once delivered to the saints.

“*Thirdly.* That this denial by the Rev. Luther Willson disqualifies him for the office of a teacher in the Christian church; inasmuch as it is a rejection of an essential part of the counsel of God, a denial of the record God has given of his Son.

“Accordingly his pastoral office in the churches in our fellowship and connexion is now declared to be ended, and his pastoral relation to the church in Brooklyn in particular ought to be, and is hereby dissolved.

“In this decision, the Consociation assume no right, and take no liberty, other than is common to all men acting in the same relation and circumstances; the right of exercising their own judgment, and the liberty of obeying God. Painful, therefore, as is the duty they have been called to perform, to have shrunk from it, for the consciousness of fallibility ever to be acknowledged, would have been virtually to annihilate our obligations to the church, and to its glorious Head.

“While they deeply lament the necessity for the course they have taken, they are supported by the consciousness, that a supreme regard to their divine Lord and Master, and a sincere desire to fulfil their covenant engagements to the church, have guided and governed them in that course.

“Intreating the church and society to cultivate peace on Christian principles, and tenderly admonishing its late

pastor to return to the Christian faith, they commend you all to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and make you wise unto salvation.

“The following paper was handed in, when the Result was thus far made up.

‘To the venerable Ecclesiastical Council now convened at Brooklyn, to hear and determine on a charge of heresy against the Rev. Luther Willson.

‘We, the subscribers, parties concerned, viewing it more desirable for the interests of religion and for the peace of the society in this town, that the case now under consideration should be settled by a Mutual Council, do request the Council now convened, to direct to the choice of such Council to hear and determine the case of Mr. Willson. The business of the Mutual Council shall be to dismiss Mr. Willson, and set him on such grounds, as to ministerial character, as they may judge proper. The Council to be chosen shall be of such a character, and chosen on such principles, as shall be approved by the Council now convened.

‘For Luther Willson,

J. NELSON.

JOSEPH SCARBOROUGH,
in behalf of the aggrieved Brethren.

JOHN PARISH,

SHUBAEL BROWN,

NATHAN WITTER, Jr.

for the Society.’

“After consultation on this subject, the question, Will you accede to the above proposal? was put, and passed in the affirmative.

“Mr. Willson, on his part, having, in the apprehension of the Consociation, receded from the conciliatory terms in the above agreement, it was voted that the minutes be closed and published.

“Passed in Consociation, Brooklyn, 7th February, 1817.

“MOSES C. WELCH, *Moderator.*

“SAMUEL P. WILLIAMS, *Scribe.*

“A true copy of the original minutes.

“S. P. WILLIAMS.”

The Result of the Consociation states, that "against proceeding to trial, it was objected on the part of the pastor, and also on the part of the society, that the Consociation had not jurisdiction in the case."

The following was the declaration of the pastor against the authority of the Consociation to take cognizance of the complaint :

"BROOKLYN, FEB. 5, 1817.

"To the Elders and Messengers of the Consociated Churches of the County of Windham, now convened at Brooklyn to examine and determine upon the charge of heresy against the Rev. Luther Willson, Junior Pastor of this Church.

"The said Willson does hereby declare, that he does not consider himself amenable to this body, for such reason, or reasons, as he shall think proper to offer.

"LUTHER WILLSON."

After the reasons were offered, and the Consociation decided that they had jurisdiction, the pastor, still considering his reasons against their authority to be good, and such as ought to have prevailed, he repeated in substance the protest which he had made before ; at the same time requesting liberty to appear before them according to circumstances, as far as their views of propriety and their indulgence would permit.

"Brooklyn, Feb. 6th, 1817.

"The subscriber again declares against the right of the jurisdiction of this Ecclesiastical Council over him for heresy, or any crime ; at the same time begging leave to appear before them, as far as may be proper, and as occasion may require, while they proceed to examine and determine the charge of heresy presented against him by William Barrett, a Christian brother.

"LUTHER WILLSON."

An important objection made to the jurisdiction of this Council, rested upon a vote of an association of ministers, in which the junior pastor of the church in Brooklyn concurred, and in which he formally and expressly declared his dissent from the claims of consociation, and his adherence to congregational principles.

The vote of the Association was as follows :

“ At a meeting of the Eastern Association of the County of Windham at the house of Rev. Elisha Atkins, in Killingly, Oct. 12, 1813—present,

Rev. Messrs. JOSIAH WHITNEY, D. D. *Mod'r.*
 ANDREW LEE, D. D. *Scribe,*
 ELISHA ATKINS,
 LUTHER WILLSON.

“ A Consociation having lately been holden in Canterbury, by letters written by the Rev. Moses C. Welsh and Ludovicus Weld ; and the churches under the pastoral care of members of this Association, residing in the county of Windham, having been called on to send delegates to said Consociation ; and as, in our apprehension, the design of establishing a Consociation in said county is to bring the churches into bondage, on the motion of the moderator, the following expression of our sentiments on the subject was voted unanimously, viz.

“ 1. We believe that every regular church of Christ is invested by the great Head of the Church with plenary power to judge, of itself, and for itself, what is right in matters of faith and discipline ; and that neither churches nor their pastors have power given them of God, to lord it over one another, or censure one another, because they use the power Christ hath given them.

“ 2. We censure none because they differ in opinion from ourselves respecting these matters ; are willing to hold communion with them, to ask counsel of them, and give counsel to them, as occasion may require ; but we disclaim all right to bind them by our decisions, or to consider ourselves bound by theirs, farther than we judge them agreeable to the divine rule.

“ 3. We conceive it to be our duty to maintain and defend the liberty of the churches, and to stand fast ourselves in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and not suffer any man or body of men to bring us into bondage.

“ 4. As such are our views, such our understanding of the scriptures, we discard the claims made by the Consociations in this state, to give law to the churches, and to judge for them in matters of faith or discipline, and declare ourselves adherents to the congregational system.

“The above a true copy from the records of said Association.

“Test,

ANDREW LEE, *Scribe.*”

The counsel for Mr. W. who discussed the question of jurisdiction, has furnished the following with his own hand, as the substance of the argument founded upon the act of Mr. W. as a member of the Association.

“The above declaration of the Association, of which Mr. Willson had become a member, was a principal ground of objection made to the jurisdiction of the Consociation over the junior pastor of the church in Brooklyn. And this was conceived to be sufficient, even if no other objections had been offered relative to the same point. The argument was presented to the Consociation in the following light.

“A Consociation, according to the Saybrook Platform, is composed of pastors and churches, who mutually and respectively agree to be bound by the rules there prescribed for such bodies. Each must be bound by its own act, and not by the act of the other. Granting, therefore, that this church were now unquestionably connected with the Consociation of Windham County, it would not follow that the pastor is under its jurisdiction. He is not, unless he has placed himself there by his own act.

“That this is not an unfounded assertion, contrived up merely for the present occasion, may be shown from the publick declaration of the Consociation in Tolland county, in defence of their own proceedings in the dismissal of Mr. Abbot, of Coventry. In assigning the reasons why their jurisdiction extended to him, which he had undertaken to deny, in a publication relating to the subject, they say, (page 11,) ‘No one, i. e. no minister, was formally inquired of, upon his associating with a consociated body, and receiving the charge of a consociated church, whether he viewed himself as belonging to consociation. It belonged to the individual formally to decline; to manifest that he “differed or dissented,” if such were his choice. The propriety of this is admitted even by the “statement.” But no such act of his appears till after the complaint of his church; but, on the contrary, in every thing by which

his brethren since 1790 expressed their "consent" to be considered of the Consociation, he conducted like them.'

"As this is the language of an Association in a matter exactly similar to that now before this body, it will surely be admitted as an authority proper to be appealed to and relied upon. It is admitted, that a pastor may dissent from his church, 'if such be his choice,' as to being in connexion with consociation; and the reason why Mr. Abbot's dissent was not considered as valid by the Consociation of Tolland County, was, because it came too late. It was not offered until a complaint had been made against him to the Consociation. The acts by which Mr. Abbot is supposed to have signified his consent to belong to, and to be under the jurisdiction of the Consociation, are stated in the following quotation: 'He took charge of a consociated church, succeeded a consociated pastor, and joined the associated pastors, who in a formal manner voted, and entered it upon their records, that they formed their body according to the general plan of ecclesiastical polity adopted in the *Saybrook Platform*. Notwithstanding which, he did not follow the rule which himself had sanctioned, he did not "withdraw or dissent," but continued with the Association, was appointed and acted as register of the same several years, and by appointment attended as a delegate the General Association. His brethren, therefore, consider themselves and him as having belonged to consociation, and do not agree with him, that "it cannot admit of a moment's doubt, that he was independent of its jurisdiction."'

"Here we have the reasons in full, why Mr. Abbot was claimed by the Consociation in Tolland. They are principally derived from his connexion with the Association of consociated pastors, and not manifesting that he dissented from them with respect to consociation. If, then, these were the reasons upon which the Consociation claimed jurisdiction over Mr. Abbot, and the course which he ought to have pursued to render himself independent of that jurisdiction is here pointed out, what can be the ground of such claim over the junior pastor in Brooklyn? He has surely dissented in language not to be misunderstood. He has not only not joined an Association of consociated pastors, as did Mr. Abbot; but he has joined one which said with united voice, that they 'discard the claims made by the

Consociations in this state, to give law to the churches, and to judge for them in matters either of faith or discipline ;' and which 'declared themselves adherents to the congregational system.'

"This declaration or dissent of the junior pastor of this church was made in the most publick body with which he had any connexion. It was not delayed until a complaint was entered against him, nor until difficulties began to arise between him and his people ; but it was made the first time that the subject was ever proposed to him ; at the very time that he united with the Association to which he belonged, while there was entire peace and union between him and his church. By what act, then, has he ever put himself under the jurisdiction of this body ?

"Will it be said, that, by taking charge of a consociated church, in connexion with a *consociated senior pastor*, he has thus shown his choice to be of the Consociation ? When the junior pastor, now before you, was ordained, no reference was had to the Consociation of Windham County. The church in Brooklyn had never intimated to Mr. Willson that they considered themselves as belonging to it. And you have evidence in this associational act, that the senior pastor of this church, whose ministerial life in this place has been more than half the time that Consociations have existed in the state, held this language to his colleague from the beginning, 'We have no connexion with any Consociation.' For he and all in the Association unite in saying, that an attempt was then making to *establish* a Consociation ; which is to say, that they considered the one formerly existing, as extinct. It was for this reason that they raised their voices against it, and unanimously opposed the existence of a Consociation within their limits. What propriety, then, could there have been in Mr. Willson's dissenting upon his ordination ? If the aged and venerable pastor of this church was not able to inform him, whether they then belonged to a Consociation, who could furnish the evidence ? Was it to be expected, under such circumstances, that Mr. Willson could have had the most remote apprehension, that, by settling in Brooklyn in the manner he did, he consented to put himself under the jurisdiction of this body ? Has he ever done a single act by

which such consent can be fairly inferred?* On the contrary, has not every act which relates to the subject held out this language, 'I am not of the Consociation?' Will it then be said, that there is that *kind* of right in this body to exercise jurisdiction over Mr. Willson, which they could wish to have, in case they proceed? And will they proceed in the trial of this cause, when it is so contrary to the wish of almost all concerned? It is believed, that, upon due consideration, this body will not view it as expedient to attend to the complaint exhibited against the junior pastor of this church. In this belief, the subject is submitted to your candid and impartial consideration."

This argument, which maintains the right of the junior pastor to *dissent*, in the manner in which he *did* dissent, by his act in the Association of which he was a member, does not expressly deny the connexion of the church of which he was a pastor, with the consociated churches of Windham county.

That the church in Brooklyn once belonged to the Consociation of the County of Windham, and "had acknowledged this relation by a series of consociational acts," was not disputed. It was readily admitted by all parties. At the same time, important circumstances and considerations were presented to the Council, which furnished presumptive evidence, that the present Consociation of Windham

* I will here observe, that it was stated before the Consociation at Brooklyn, that Mr. W. at a church meeting manifested his assent to belong to the Consociation. It was represented, that a motion was once before the church to be unconsociated, and that Mr. W. prevented the church from acting upon it.

The following was the fact:—The Rev. Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, a short time after the *vote* of the Association, (which contained an entire *dissent* from the Consociation intended to be *established* in the county, and an express declaration in favour of the congregational system,) brought forward a motion before the church, similar to the one acted upon by the Association. By this motion, the church were called upon, not to withdraw or disconnect themselves from a Consociation to which they belonged; but publickly to declare their opinion against a consociational system of government, and their strict adherence to congregational principles. When the motion was before the church, one of the brethren arose, and observed, that he was not acquainted with Consociations, and, for his part, he wished for an opportunity to obtain information upon the subject before he acted. Upon this, Mr. W. the junior pastor, observed, that if any member of the church wished particularly for information upon the subject, it was reasonable and proper that he should have time to obtain it. It was said, that, in consequence of this observation of the junior pastor, the motion was not acted upon. The meeting was dissolved; and, as the church from that time never received any letter to meet in Consociation, the subject was never called up afterwards, until the difficulty respecting Mr. W.'s change of sentiments had commenced. Mr. W. the junior pastor, gave no opinion in favour of consociation; nor did he *intimate* that he considered the church consociated. This is the *act* of Mr. W. by which he is said to have assented to be of the Consociation.

County was not the same as that which existed half a century before ; and, consequently, that the church in Brooklyn, which had in no instance sent messengers to the present Consociation, or in any manner acknowledged its authority, could not be considered as belonging to it, or any of its members as subject to its jurisdiction. I shall not here be at pains to note the particulars that were then presented, but shall enter immediately upon the examination of documents, with which I was then unacquainted, which are now in my possession, and which furnish satisfactory and conclusive evidence, distinct from any thing that is yet brought into view, that the Consociation had not jurisdiction in the case.

I. We have the opinion of a convention of ministers and delegates from the churches of Windham Original Association, in the year 1800, that there was then no Consociation in the county ; that some visible bond of social union among the churches was much needed, to unite their views and interests, and to promote their particular and general welfare. The convention, in pursuance of an object so desirable as the purity, union, and prosperity of the churches, adopted and recommended a *Plan of Consociation* materially different from the system of consociation formerly established by the constitution of the churches, called *Saybrook Platform*. This plan was adopted and published by the convention, accompanied with an address, recommending it to the approbation and acceptance of the several churches within their limits ; but it never went into effect ; it was not adopted by the churches to which it was proposed. It, however, furnishes the clear and decided opinion of the ministers and delegates of most of the churches in the county of Windham, that they were not then connected with a Consociation, but were solicitous that a system of consociation, or some visible bond of social union, should be established among them.

The following is the plan recommended by the convention in 1800 :

“ A Plan of Consociation adopted and recommended by a Convention of Churches in Windham County, Nov. 1800.

“ The subject of Consociation, or some visible bond of social union among our churches, having been, for years, a matter of serious consideration with the associated

ministers of Windham county, they, at length, agreed on a special meeting for that purpose, and that the churches be requested to attend by delegation. A circular letter was, accordingly, prepared, and sent to the several churches, requesting them, individually, to send a delegate, to meet in convention, for the purpose of deliberating on this important business. The motion meeting the approbation of every church to whom a letter was addressed, the convention met, and the following is the *result* of their deliberations :

“ At a convention of the ministers of the original Association of Windham county, with delegates from the several churches, at Mansfield, Nov. 11, 1800, for the purpose of conferring on a mode of Consociation, or some visible bond of social union among our churches, there were present,

Pastors.

Delegates from the churches.

Rev. Messrs. *Thomas Brockway*, Mod'r.

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>Moses C. Welch</i> , Scribe, | Brother <i>Frederick Freeman</i> , |
| <i>John Gurlcy</i> , | Deacon <i>Daniel Abel</i> , |
| <i>Andrew Judson</i> , | Deac. <i>Noah Pain</i> , |
| <i>Eliphalet Lyman</i> , | Deac. <i>Jedidiah Morse</i> , |
| <i>Walter Lyon</i> , | Deac. <i>Joshua Grosvenor</i> , |
| <i>Enoch Pond</i> , | Brother <i>Isaac Kendall</i> , |
| <i>Zebulon Ely</i> , | Brother <i>Solomon Williams</i> , |
| <i>Israel Day</i> , | Brother <i>David Cady</i> , |
| <i>William Graves</i> , | Deac. <i>Aaron Lyon</i> , |
| <i>William Storrs</i> , | Deac. <i>William Walker</i> , |
| <i>Ludovicus Weld</i> , | Brother <i>William Huntington</i> , |
| <i>Elijah Waterman</i> , | Deac. <i>Thomas Tileston</i> , |
| <i>John Sherman</i> , | Brother <i>Benjamin Storrs</i> , |
| <i>Daniel Dow</i> , | Brother <i>Thomas Dyke</i> , and |
| [<i>West Woodstock vacant.</i>] | Brother <i>Ebenezer Smith</i> . |

“ The moderator opened the convention by prayer ; after which they adjourned to attend publick worship, and to proceed to business immediately after divine service.

“ Met accordingly, and continued the session, by adjournment, until the evening of Nov. 12th, during which, after solemn addresses to the Father of Light, for counsel and direction in the important affair, a Plan of Consociation was exhibited, and seriously discussed, consisting of the following articles :

“ ARTICLE I. The Consociation shall consist of those pastors and churches, by delegation, who agree to adopt

this and the following articles ; which shall be the constitution of church government for the Consociation of Windham County, and shall go into operation when nine churches shall agree to and adopt the same.

“ART. II. Every church that has a settled pastor shall be represented by one ruling elder or delegate, to be chosen annually. Every church that has no settled minister, and is wishing to support one, shall be entitled to be represented by one ruling elder or delegate. The elders or delegates not known, shall produce certificates from the churches which they represent.

“ART. III. A majority of the Consociation shall be competent to the dispatch of business.

“ART. IV. A Moderator shall be chosen by ballot, who shall continue in office one year ; a Scribe to minute the doings, and reasons of any judgment that may be rendered ; and a standing Register to record the same. Any other officers that may be found necessary and convenient, shall be annually appointed.

“ART. V. The Consociation shall have cognizance of all things that regard the welfare of the particular churches belonging to the body.

“Particularly,

“1. They shall be considered as having the right, at all times, to originate, and adopt, for themselves, and propose to the churches, any rules or regulations, which they may judge to be calculated for the edification and well ordering of the same.

“2. It shall be considered as their duty to assist the pastors and churches of the body, by their counsel and advice, in any cases of difficulty, when applied to for the purpose.

“3. They shall have a right to censure irreclaimable pastors, churches, or individual members of the churches of the body, who fall into heretical sentiments, or scandalous immoralities, upon complaints regularly laid before them.

“4. A complaint cannot be received by this body, or considered as coming regularly before them, unless the previous steps have been taken, pointed out by our Lord, in Mat. xviii, 15, 16, 17.

“5. When a member of any particular church, belonging to this body, shall view himself aggrieved, or injured, by his being laid under censure, he shall have the right of appeal to the Consociation.

“ART. VI. Pastors elected by churches belonging to the Consociation, shall, previously to their ordination, be approved by the body, or their committee. The Consociation shall also examine and approbate candidates for the gospel ministry.

“ART. VII. In Consociation every member shall have an equal vote.

“ART. VIII. The Consociation shall meet, annually, on the first Tuesday in September; at which meeting a sermon shall be delivered. And when any emergency shall require, it shall be the duty of the moderator, or, in case of his absence, the senior pastor, with the advice of one other member, by a circular letter, stating the business, addressed to each minister, or delegate, where the church is vacant, to convene the body, at a time not less than ten days after notice. It shall also be the duty of the person, or persons, who apply for such special meeting, seasonably to convey the letters.

“ART. IX. At the annual meeting, the members shall report to the body the state of religion in each particular church, viz. the number of its members, additions, diminutions by death, excommunication, or otherways, the preceding year.

“ART. X. The foregoing articles may be amended by calling a special convention, whenever a majority of the churches shall signify their desire for the same to the Consociation. And in case of emendations agreed upon by such convention, they shall be referred to the individual churches for their adoption, and when adopted unanimously by them, shall become a part of this constitution.

“*Voted*, unanimously, in convention, that we agree to the foregoing articles, as a system of church government agreeable to the word of God; and they are accordingly recommended to the several churches for their concurrence and adoption.

“*Voted*, to appoint Messrs. *Welch, Ely, Waterman, Sherman, Dow, Williams* and *Freeman*, a committee to correct, and prepare this result for the press, and procure

a publication of the same, together with some arguments and scripture proof in support of it; and, also, to add a serious address to the churches, on the subject of Christian union and fellowship.

“Attest, THOMAS BROCKWAY, *Mod'r.*
 MOSES C. WELCH, *Scribe.*”

In looking over this Constitution, regarding it as a memorial of the wisdom and piety of this large and respectable convention, we are led to ask, why this solicitude for years to form and establish a Consociation in Windham county, or some visible bond of union among the churches, if the churches were then in possession of a system of Consociation, voluntarily adopted, and sanctioned nearly a century before, by the highest ecclesiastical and civil authority? Was it possible that these ministers and delegates (many or most of them) when forming this Constitution, and recommending it to the several churches for their adoption, were actually consociated according to the plan of ecclesiastical polity contained in Saybrook Platform? If they were thus consociated, in what light are the proceedings of this convention to be viewed? Surely they must bear the character of open hostility to the ecclesiastical constitution of the state. But will any believe that the members of this convention were thus employed in preparing and recommending a plan of Consociation, when, at that very moment, they knew that their churches were consociated, and were bound to maintain an inviolable regard to that system of union, government, and discipline, contained in their ancient constitution? None will believe this. We therefore conclude, that, when these fifteen pastors and as many delegates *unanimously* adopted and recommended to the churches a plan of Consociation, or a visible bond of social union, they were *unanimously* of the opinion, that the Consociation, which once existed, had sometime become extinct, and that, consequently, they were at liberty to form one upon such principles as appeared best adapted to promote the union, order, and general interest of the churches.

The proceedings of this convention furnish the best evidence that we could have of the united opinion of ministers and churches, that in the year 1800 there was no

Consociation in Windham county, no bond of social union among the churches, no constitution of church government, by which the "churches were consociated for mutual affording to each other such assistance as might be requisite upon all occasions ecclesiastical."* And if, as is evident from the unanimous opinion of the convention, there was no Consociation in Windham county in the year 1800, then the present Consociation must have been formed and established since, and could have no more jurisdiction over a pastor of the church in Brooklyn, or any of its members, than over a pastor or member of a church in a neighbouring state: For the church in Brooklyn had formed no connexion with this, or any ecclesiastical body of that name, since the year 1800, any more than with a presbytery of the state of New-York or Pennsylvania; and both the pastors, the *senior* as well as *junior*, had formally and expressly declared their dissent from any system of Consociation intended to be *established* in their immediate vicinity.

II. I shall now examine and compare extracts from authentick records, from which it will appear that the present Consociation is not the same as formerly; and, consequently, that the church in Brooklyn had no connexion with the council of churches, that took cognizance of the complaint against their pastor.

There is no question that the church in Brooklyn was once consociated according to the articles for the administration of church discipline contained in Saybrook Platform. When the Consociation of Windham County, to which the church in Brooklyn belonged, and which was established agreeably to the ancient ecclesiastical constitution of the state, ceased to exist, I am not solicitous to know. It is sufficient, to be informed from the proceedings and *united opinion* of the numerous and respectable convention of 1800, that it was not in existence then; and

* If the "churches were consociated for mutual affording to each other such assistance as might be requisite upon all occasions ecclesiastical," (see the second article of church discipline, at the close of this Review,) why was this convention employed in *planning* a Consociation, or in *forming* a visible bond of social union, a constitution of church government, when, in fact, they *were consociated*, when they had an ecclesiastical constitution, a visible bond of union? To this question I am persuaded no answer can be given. I therefore conclude beyond a doubt, that the convention (when employed in planning and recommending a system of Consociation) did *not* consider the churches as *consociated as having a constitution, a visible bond of social union.*

also to know, that the church in Brooklyn from that time (and how much longer I shall not inquire) had not been connected with any Consociation at the time of the trial of the junior pastor.

The first Consociation of which we have any account since the convention of churches in 1800, was in the year 1812, in Eastford society in Ashford. From the book of records kept by the Consociation, the following is extracted :

“ At a Consociation of the churches of Windham Original Association,* convened by letters missive at the house of Ephraim Spaulding, in Eastford society in Ashford, Dec. 22, 1812—present, &c.

“ The jurisdiction of the Consociation was objected to. The question being submitted, whether the church in Eastford and its pastor are in regular connexion with the consociated churches, voted in the affirmative.”

This Consociation was called to judge upon a complaint of a member of the church against the pastor. How it was formed, or on what principle jurisdiction was claimed, I know not. The records do not furnish the information; nor have I received it from any other source.

The next meeting of a Consociation was at Canterbury.

“ At a regular meeting of the Consociation of Windham County, convened at the meeting-house in the first society in Canterbury, on the first Tuesday in October, 1813, there were present,” &c.

I have good reason to believe, from various considerations, that the present Consociation of Windham County was formed at Canterbury in October, 1813.

1. It may be seen by comparing the records, that the Consociation at Canterbury, nine months after the meeting at Eastford, was not the same as that at Eastford nine months before.

The council at Eastford was a “ *Consociation of the churches of Windham Original Association.*” The council

* There were two Associations in the county of Windham—the *Original* and the *Eastern*. The church in Brooklyn belonged to the *Eastern Association*; they could not, therefore, belong to the Consociation at Eastford, because this Consociation included only the churches of the *Original Association*. The church in Brooklyn, therefore, was necessarily excluded from the Consociation at Eastford, and had no letter sent to them to meet in that council.

at Canterbury was "*the Consociation of Windham County.*" The former was limited to the churches of a particular Association; and in consequence of this, several churches in the county (the church in Brooklyn among the number) were necessarily excluded. The latter was so designated as to include all the churches in the county that should choose to become connected with it.

2. If the Consociation at Canterbury, in October, was the same as that at Eastford in December before, it was manifestly irregular in its appointment. This none will deny; for the irregularity was such as could not have occurred, in the opinion of any one conversant with Saybrook Platform, through inadvertence, or mere mistake. The Platform very plainly made it the duty of the moderator of the last meeting of the Council, if he were living, with the advice and consent of two more elders, to call a Council (or Consociation) when they should judge there was need of it. "That member who was chosen at the last session of any Council to be moderator, shall, with the advice and consent of two more elders, (or, in case of the moderator's death, any two elders of the same Consociation,) call another Council within the circuit, when they shall judge there is need thereof."* The Rev. Dr. Welch, of Mansfield, was moderator of the Council at Eastford. It was therefore *his* duty as *moderator*, as he was living, with the concurrence of two more elders, when they saw there was need of a Council at Canterbury, to appoint a meeting, and call the consociated churches together. But the Rev. Dr. Welch did not appoint the meeting at Canterbury as moderator of the last Council, as the Platform directs. The Rev. Moses C. Welch and Ludovicus Weld (claiming no official authority) sent out letters to all, or nearly all the churches in the county, desiring or requesting them to meet in Consociation at Canterbury.

On the supposition that a Consociation was *then* formed without any regard to its connexion with the Council at Eastford, these ministers considering this Council evidently irregular, and therefore of no account, † might send

* See the 10th article of discipline.

† These gentlemen probably knew, that the Consociation at Eastford was *irregular*, because (according to the unanimous opinion of the convention in 1800, of which they were members) at the time of its appointment there was no Consociation in the county. And, even if, at that time, there was a Consociation in the county, the Coun-

out letters as they did, not signing them officially as belonging to a Consociation, without any impropriety, or the violation of any rule ; and all the churches, or any of them, that came together, whether formerly consociated or not, might join in Consociation according to the tenour of the letter, call it a regular meeting, proceed to business, and make any appointments or arrangements for the future, that they should think necessary and proper.

3. The Rev. gentlemen that wrote to the churches to meet and join in Consociation, sent letters to *several churches*, who were known never to have had any connexion with Saybrook Platform, or a consociational form of government, but to have adopted a different constitution, or to have had no constitution, other than the Bible, and that which they had formed for themselves. And can any believe, that these gentlemen, when sending out their letters, considered themselves as acting in an official capacity, and authorized by Saybrook Platform to *notify churches* to meet and act in Consociation, which, from their establishment, had no more been consociated than the churches in Rhode-Island or Massachusetts? This is incredible. It is not within the limits of probability or conjecture, that these gentlemen, who published their opinion in 1800, that no Consociation existed in the county, assumed to themselves, in 1813, the authority and responsibility of calling together *churches that were never consociated*, to sit and act in a Consociation that had long been established by a particular constitution.

The conclusion therefore is this. These ministers, and many others, had no doubt been anxious for years, that a Consociation, or some visible bond of union among the churches, should be established in the county. They had made an attempt in 1800, and failed. But the object was too important to be given up. A council of the churches, claiming to be a Consociation, (on what principle it is not easy to imagine,) met at Eastford ; but its limits extended

cil at Eastford was evidently *irregular*, according to *Saybrook Platform* ; and therefore they did not think it proper *officially* to appoint a Consociation at Canterbury on the ground of its connexion with the Council at Eastford. The Council at Eastford could not have been a regular ecclesiastical tribunal according to *Saybrook Platform*, because one church (if not more) that was represented in that Council, had never *adopted* this Platform ; but was originally established by vote, and had continued, upon *Cambridge Platform*. a constitution of church discipline, essentially different from the constitution formed at Saybrook.

no farther than a particular association of ministers. A considerable number of churches, some once consociated, and others separate, congregational, or upon Cambridge Platform, were not included. As a general union in faith, order, and discipline, was a favourite object with many of the clergy as well as laity, it was probably thought desirable to extend the privilege of such union to all the churches in the county, that were in immediate fellowship, and that would agree thus to unite. The Rev. Messrs. Welch and Weld, in all probability, from the influence of these principles and views, and with an assurance of the concurrent approbation and influence of many, who felt an interest in the same benevolent object, wrote to the several churches in the county, (whether formerly consociated or not,) requesting them to meet in Consociation at Canterbury. These gentlemen very prudently sent out their letters (if I am not mistaken in my recollection) not in terms of *official authority*, as members of a Consociation, but in the capacity of individuals.

A letter was sent to the church in Brooklyn. It was in the care of the senior pastor; but being overlooked or forgotten at the proper time to read it publickly, it was not communicated to the church.

4. Another circumstance worthy of notice, was the subsequent omission of sending letters to the church in Brooklyn. The Consociation voted at Canterbury, that they would henceforward meet annually. The first annual meeting was at Lebanon; the next at Thompson. The church in Brooklyn, that was requested to send a messenger or delegate to join the meeting at Canterbury, received no notice to meet at Lebanon or Thompson. No letter was sent. Why this omission—why this neglect, if the church in Brooklyn belonged to the Consociation? Was it not well known to the moderator, when he appointed these several meetings, that the church in Brooklyn was formerly consociated? Was not the name of the Rev. Josiah Whitney, a pastor of the church, before the publick, (in a late publication in the neighbourhood of the moderator,) as a member of the Consociation of Windham County, which met at Coventry in 1761?

If the Consociation at Lebanon or Thompson was the same as that at Coventry, the church in Brooklyn would

as certainly have been called upon to send a messenger or delegate; as any other church in the county. But the church in Brooklyn was not notified to send a messenger to either of these meetings. These circumstances furnish a *strong presumption* that the present Consociation is not the same as that at Coventry in the year 1761. If it had been the same, the church in Brooklyn would have received due notification with others. But on the supposition that the present Consociation commenced its existence and operations at Canterbury, we account for the omission of Brooklyn in after appointments. The church in Brooklyn, not sending a delegate agreeably to the request of Messrs. Welch and Weld, the moderator would easily conclude, that they were not disposed to join the Consociation, and consequently it would be of no use to send to them again. If the church in Brooklyn was consociated, it was certainly incumbent upon the moderator, in appointing the meeting at Lebanon, and also at Thompson, to give due notice to this consociated church, and call upon them to send a delegate. Otherwise the meeting, in both cases, must have been *irregular*. Surely the moderator cannot be chargeable with such an oversight or neglect. Some of these circumstances, not the least important, were offered to the Consociation at Brooklyn as an objection, and were considered by the pastor as affording presumptive evidence against their jurisdiction.

5. I shall now bring into view proceedings of the Consociation at Thompson in October, 1815, from which it will appear, that the present Consociation is not the same as formerly.

“At a meeting of the Consociation of Windham County in Thompson, October 3, 1815—

“*Voted*, That this Consociation, formed generally on the plan usually styled Saybrook Platform, put such a construction on the 4th article of discipline, as shall allow every church to send only one messenger or delegate; which delegate shall have an equal vote with an elder or pastor.

“In consequence of the above vote, the Rev. Eliphalet Lyman, and Jonathan Morse delegate, from the first church in Woodstock, and the Rev. Hollis Sampson, and Abijah Dean delegate, from the second church in Ashford, ex-

hibited their credentials, and took their seats as members of the Consociation.”

The Consociation, at this meeting, furnish the information, that it was formed *generally* upon Saybrook Platform; and they agree to put such a construction upon a particular article of discipline as to limit every church belonging to it to the representation of one messenger, and as to grant to each messenger an equal vote with an elder; whereas the article itself, in language too plain to be misunderstood, allows a church to send more than one messenger, and does not allow a messenger an equal vote with an elder. The Consociation, to make way for the admission of churches into their union, that would not become consociated without an accommodation to their views, put what they call a *construction* upon an article of discipline, directly contrary to its obvious and undisputed meaning; and also to make way for the *construction*, which the terms of the article could not possibly admit, they declare the Consociation to have been formed *generally* (not entirely and exclusively) upon the plan usually styled Saybrook Platform.

The qualifying term *generally* was evidently used to show, that this Consociation, when it was formed, though it adopted Saybrook Platform, as a constitution of church government, upon general principles, in preference to forming one *essentially new*, did not bind themselves to adhere to it invariably, according to its true meaning; but considered themselves at liberty, in some instances at least, to deviate, to omit, to alter, and probably to add, as particular circumstances and the interest of religion might render it necessary or expedient.

Suppose this Consociation to be the same as that which was known in the county half a century before; what was the necessity of giving publick information, at this late period, that it was formed upon *Saybrook Platform*? Did any one ever imagine, that the Consociation of Windham County was formed upon any *other* platform? If not, what was the propriety (not to say necessity) of a vote, containing information of a fact, that was never disputed? Continuing the supposition, that this Consociation was the same as formerly, I would further inquire, by what means

its members, at Thompson, had ascertained, that it was formed upon Saybrook Platform in a *restricted and qualified sense*; not wholly and exclusively, but only *generally*? To what ancient records had they access, by which they came to the knowledge of the important fact, that the Consociation of the County of Windham, in its earliest establishment, did not adopt the ecclesiastical constitution of the state, *absolutely and without reserve*? Let them bring forward an authentick record, from which it will appear, that the first Consociation in Windham county was “formed *generally* upon the plan styled Saybrook Platform;” and that it allowed each church to send only one messenger, and this messenger, without exception, to have an equal vote with an elder; and the present Consociation will so far be acknowledged the same as formerly. But until this record is produced, it will not be thus acknowledged; and some, no doubt, will believe, that many who were in the vote declaring it to have been formed *generally* upon Saybrook Platform, were better acquainted with the time, place, and other circumstances of its formation, from personal knowledge, than from ancient records in their possession.

I would further remark upon the proceedings at Thompson, that, *in consequence* of the vote declaring the Consociation to have been formed *generally* upon Saybrook Platform, and allowing each church to send only one messenger, and each messenger an equal vote with an elder, the pastor and delegate of a particular church, that was formerly consociated, became members of this Consociation.

It is *particularly observable*, that this Consociation *passed a vote*, containing information, that it was not formed *entirely* upon Saybrook Platform; and also, *by vote*, put such a *construction* upon an article of discipline as was directly contrary to its obvious meaning, in order to take into their connexion a pastor and his church, who were both declared by a Consociation at Eastford, not three years before, to “be in regular connexion with the consociated churches.” The Rev. Mr. Sampson, and his church, (the second church in Ashford, Eastford society,) over whom the Consociation at Eastford claimed jurisdiction in 1812, would not, it seems, *join* the Consociation in 1815, until a vote was passed conformable to their views, and to make it evident, that the Consociation at Thompson was in some

respects upon a different plan from that, upon which it was established before, when the pastor and church were considered as belonging to it, and subject to its jurisdiction. This circumstance is sufficient, of itself, to determine the question, that the Consociation at Thompson in 1815 was not the same as that at Eastford in 1812; for none will believe, that the Consociation at Thompson were so complaisant to the Rev. Mr. Sampson and his church, as to alter or modify their constitution of church government to receive them into their connexion, when, *in fact*, they were consociated already, and both the church and its pastor had long been an essential part of their community.

6. The present Consociation is known to be established upon a principle, in one respect, so different from the former Consociation of Windham County, that it could have no jurisdiction over a pastor of the church in Brooklyn, even if the pastor were consociated agreeably to the ancient constitution of the churches.

The Platform says, "that, according to the common practice of our churches, nothing shall be deemed an act or judgment of any Council, which hath not the major part of the elders present concurring, and such a number of the messengers present as makes a majority of the Council." Thus the Platform makes the concurrence of a major part of the elders of the consociated churches, or of the elders that are present, at the meeting of a Council, indispensably requisite to the validity of any decision. An act or judgment of a Council, which has not the concurrence of at least a majority of the elders present, is nothing. The pastor of a consociated church, upon trial for any offence, is hereby *assured*, that the representation of the churches can in no instance affect his ministerial and pastoral relations without the consent of a *majority* of the consociated elders.

The Council at Brooklyn, that formed the Result upon a charge of heresy against the junior pastor, consisted of fourteen elders and nineteen messengers. According to the Platform, not less than eight of these fourteen elders must have concurred in the decision, and such a number of messengers as was necessary to make a majority of the Council. Otherwise, the act or judgment of the Council would be of no more account, than that of as many citi-

zens or freemen, assuming to themselves the jurisdiction of an ecclesiastical tribunal. The Platform made it necessary, that, of thirty-three elders and messengers present, (the whole number of the Council,) seventeen (which were a majority of the Council) should concur in the Result; and that eight of the seventeen should be elders.

But the Consociation at Brooklyn was, *in fact, established* upon a principle *essentially different*. It appears from the proceedings, *from a particular act* of the Consociation at Thompson, that each messenger was entitled to an equal vote with an elder. This principle having been settled before the meeting at Brooklyn, it was in the power of the messengers of that Council, *of themselves*, to denounce and depose the pastor for heresy, (if they were disposed to do it,) even *if every elder had raised his voice against it*. And how is it possible, that a Consociation, which, in a particular case, does not necessarily require the concurrence of an *individual* elder present, in order to a decision, should be the same as that, which, in all cases, necessarily requires the concurrence of a *majority*? When it may be affirmed in any instance, without absurdity, that the Consociation does *not* require the concurrence of a *single elder present*, and, at the same time, *does* require the concurrence of, at least, a *majority of the elders present*, in reference to the same act, then, and not till then, can the Consociation at Brooklyn, in 1817, be considered, on any principle, as entitled to jurisdiction, or claim to be established upon the same constitution as formerly, when it adhered to Saybrook Platform, without restriction, as a rule of discipline in church government.

7. Another proof that the Consociation at Brooklyn had not jurisdiction (on the supposition that the pastor and church were consociated agreeably to the Platform) is the fact, that several churches, represented in that Council, had never adopted the Platform as an ecclesiastical constitution.

One church that was represented in the Consociation at Brooklyn, has covenanted, from its first establishment, to refer any difficulties that should render a Council necessary, to a mutual, decisive Council of neighbouring churches, without any reference to *Consociation*, or *Saybrook Platform*.*

* The church here alluded to, belongs to the west parish in Killingly, sometimes called Westfield.

Other churches were represented in the Council at Brooklyn, which had *formally rejected* this Platform, and were strictly congregational;* or which were established upon a different constitution, called *Cambridge Platform*.† These churches, by their delegates, acted as judges upon a charge of heresy against the junior pastor of a church, which never had any connexion with a Consociation that was not established *solely* upon *Saybrook Platform*.

What would be thought, if the chief justice of the state of Connecticut should send out a communication, requesting the supreme judges of Massachusetts to sit and act in a judicial capacity, and give judgment in a particular case, as members of the Supreme Court of Connecticut; and these judges should comply with the message, and become a part of that court as assistants and associates in judgment? Would the decision of such a court be *legal*? Would it not be *illegal*, and the court be liable to impeachment and degradation? What, then, shall we say, when the moderator of a Consociation, the presiding officer of an ecclesiastical tribunal, calls upon churches, that do not be-

* The following is an extract from the records of a church in Canterbury, that was represented in the Consociation at Brooklyn :

"Although it be not expressed in the aforesaid covenant, that we actually dissented from Saybrook regulation of church discipline, yet we ever understood ourselves to have done it. We do therefore here solemnly declare with our whole hearts, that we do dissent from the discipline set up and expressed in said regulation; it appearing to us to be contrary to the authority of Christ in his church, set up in his word, which we look upon complete: and none can pretend to amend or add to it, without casting open contempt on Christ and his Holy Spirit: The said regulation takes the power from the brethren of the church, and also puts an absolute and decisive power in the Consociation, contrary to Christ; and also has created an association, not created or warranted by Christ in his word. These things, this church looks upon to be antichristian, unscriptural, and leads to a papal usurpation over the consciences of Christ's children."

"The foregoing is a true copy of an extract from the second covenant of the strict congregational church in Canterbury. Examined by me,

"CORNELIUS ADAMS, Clerk of said Church."

† The following is an extract from the records of another church, in Canterbury, that was represented in the ecclesiastical tribunal at Brooklyn :

"We promise to submit ourselves to the watch and discipline of Christ's church, agreeable to the scriptures, as a congregational church, according to Cambridge Platform."

"The above is a true copy of an article of agreement, entered into and signed by the brethren of the church in Westminster society, Canterbury, November 20th, 1770. From the records of said church. Attest, ERASTUS LEARNED.

"Canterbury, June 16th, 1818."

The Rev. Mr. Learned, the present pastor of the church in Westminster society, on the 16th of June, 1818, informed me, that he knew of nothing upon the church records, from which it would appear, that the church had ever adopted a different constitution of church discipline.

long to the Consociation, to sit and judge as members of this body; and these churches, that have never adopted the constitution, or have formally rejected it, obey the call, and become members of a court, in which they have no constitutional authority to advise or to act? Can the decision of such a court be *legal*? Is it not *illegal*? And what could save the whole court from impeachment and degradation, but the favourable circumstance, that, as an ecclesiastical body, their authority is *supreme*, their judgment is *final*; it can never be re-examined or reversed by a higher ecclesiastical tribunal?

In view of what has been said upon the subject of jurisdiction, the candid will decide, whether the Council at Brooklyn had any plausible or *possible* foundation for the authority, which they claimed in taking cognizance of the complaint against the junior pastor; and whether this Council (especially the individuals who were members of the convention in 1800) ought not to have *known*, that their claim to jurisdiction was *unconstitutional* and *oppressive*; an *unwarrantable assumption of power*.

I shall now attend to the proceedings of the Consociation, after they unanimously decided that they had jurisdiction.

“Feb. 6th,” (the second day of the session,) “the Council met according to adjournment. Several members, having been challenged by the accused, as having prejudged the case, were examined and acquitted.”

On the morning of the second day, after the meeting was opened, and the minutes were read, containing the determination of the Council to exercise jurisdiction, Mr. W. the pastor accused, again protested against their right to proceed. At the same time, knowing their determination, he requested liberty to appear before them, as circumstances might require, and as far as they could consistently grant his request; that the whole affair of difficulty and discipline might be properly understood by all that were present on the occasion.

Immediately after the complaint was read, Mr. W. observed, that several elders, members of the Council, had already excluded him from their ministerial fellowship, in view of the opinion for which he was charged with heresy.

He stated, that he considered this renunciation of ministerial connexion with an individual, with whom they had been associated as brethren, a real and weighty objection to their acting as judges upon the complaint. These elders had expressly and openly refused to Mr. W. the ordinary privilege of ministerial intercourse. In their individual capacity as Christian ministers, they had thus virtually declared the junior pastor of the church in Brooklyn, "disqualified for the office of a teacher in the Christian church," on account of the *very sentiment*, for which the charge of heresy was presented against him, and for which he was ultimately condemned; and yet the *Council decided* that these elders had all the qualifications requisite to an impartial judgment in deciding upon the complaint. This was the method in which the pastor *challenged* several members of the Council, and this was the decision of the Consociation of Windham County.

"The Rev. Daniel Dow," as appears from the Result, "from motives of delicacy, requested to be excused from acting in the case, and had liberty to withdraw."

The motives and delicacy of this gentleman must not be called in question. The reader will recollect the *peculiar delicacy* which he manifested as a Christian on a former occasion, when he spoke of the junior pastor of the church in Brooklyn as a more suitable companion (in a religious sense) for Mahometans and Infidels, than for Christians. It was decided by the Consociation, that this gentleman, who, about nine months before, appeared as an advocate against the pastor, and publicly reproached him as chargeable with infidelity for his departure from the faith, was a competent judge in the case before them. But the counsel for the complainant, suggesting the propriety of his retiring from the seat of judgment, as he had previously been an advocate against the pastor before an Ecclesiastical Council, he requested to be excused; and the Consociation, in accommodation to his feelings, *consented* to excuse him.

"The counsel for the complainant" (continues the Result) "proceeded, after offering evidence that the regular steps of discipline had been taken, to support by testimony the charge set forth in the complaint."

The Council appear to have been satisfied from the evidence offered, that the *regular steps of discipline had been taken*. It is a matter of some consequence, I imagine, to ascertain what the regular steps are. Never did I suppose, that the steps of discipline could be completed, so as to obtain a final judgment, until the accuser had laid his complaint before the *church* to which the parties belonged, and the accused had been favoured with an opportunity to *hear the church* upon the subject of complaint exhibited against him. But it is extremely difficult to know, in the case of the junior pastor of the church in Brooklyn, *who* was his accuser, or *who* were his accusers, before the Consociation, agreeable to any *regular process* of discipline.

The Result, in the first place, informs us, that, "*on behalf of the members of the church at whose request the Consociation was convoked*, a paper was exhibited, containing the charge of heresy against the Rev. Luther Willson." From this it appears, that the charge of heresy was exhibited in behalf of five brethren of the church (considered as individuals, or a committee) who applied for the calling of the Consociation. It is however certain, that these brethren had never taken *any steps* with the pastor upon the *charge of heresy*: they had taken neither the first, second, nor third. The "*paper exhibited*" contained no intimation of any steps taken on *their part*. The individuals, or committee, that applied to the moderator to call the Council, when they appeared before the Council at the time of the trial, did not *pretend* it, nor did any circumstances furnish evidence of the fact.

The members of the church in whose behalf the charge of heresy was exhibited, had never entered upon a course of discipline, until they exhibited brother *Barrett's* charge before the Consociation. If that was a step of discipline, to take the charge of heresy out of the hands of a brother, and bring it before the *consociated churches of Windham county*, before it had been referred to the *church in Brooklyn*, it must be placed to their credit, though all other and previous steps, on *their part*, had been conscientiously omitted.

The Result, after declaring that "the charge of heresy was exhibited in behalf of the members of the church at whose request the Consociation was convoked," speaks of

“the complainant.” “The complainant appeared, ready to substantiate his charge;” “the counsel for the complainant,” &c. By the complainant, I suppose we are to understand Mr. B. who took the first and second steps, according to the 18th of Matthew, and thus *finished his course of discipline*; for it does not appear that he ever applied to the church, or to the Consociation, to take cognizance of his complaint, though he had evidently intended it. It appears that he *lent* or *transferred* his charge of heresy, and the complaint he had prepared to lay before the church, with the explanations attending them, to his *brethren* in whose behalf the charge was exhibited, to be disposed of or used by them, as they, in their wisdom, should think best.

Mr. B. it seems, *prepared* a complaint, addressed to the church in Brooklyn, (not to the Consociation of Windham County,) but never laid it before them. The pastor was always ready to answer to the complaint at a regular meeting of the church, and never objected to the appointment of a church meeting to take into consideration the charge against him. But Mr. B. and his orthodox brethren, after the disappointment occasioned by the discovery of their secret combination at the irregular meeting of Dea. Scarborough, did not wish a meeting of the church to lay the complaint before them. Whether, therefore; Mr. B. as an individual, or the committee that applied to the Consociation, or all of them, jointly and severally, are to be considered as supporting the charge of heresy before the Council, it is an *important fact*, that no complaint was ever presented to the *church in Brooklyn* against the pastor; and consequently the third step (far the most important of all) in the process of discipline, was never taken by any member or members of the church. This fact was particularly stated, and was perfectly known to the Consociation, when sitting in judgment upon the complaint.

The knowledge of this important circumstance appeared, for a short time, to embarrass their proceeding. But, fortunately for the Consociation, (who had probably determined to surmount every obstacle that stood in the way of the pastor's dismissal,) by a singular power of invention, they hit upon an expedient that removed the difficulty at once. They quickly discovered, that the *Consociation of*

Windham County was the church in Brooklyn, to which the complaint of Mr. B. was addressed; that the government of the church, as it respected the pastor, was *wholly* in the Consociation, or Council of the churches, then assembled; and therefore the third step in the process of discipline was *then* taken, if it never had been before; and thus the way was clear to dispose of the pastor, as their wisdom and prudence might direct. I have no doubt, that this was an *entire departure* from the ancient constitution, and from the usage of the churches, and a much greater novelty in the history of the church than the new doctrine that had been preached in Brooklyn. But it was a *happy expedient* to meet the occasion; and I am satisfied, that nothing but the *inventive genius of a Consociation* could have discovered it.

The Consociation decided, that an individual of the church in Brooklyn was competent to take the first and second steps; to accuse and admonish its pastor for heresy, and to forward a complaint against him; while the church, as a body, was not competent to take cognizance of the complaint; to judge, or to admonish. The Consociation, thus *absolutely assuming* to themselves, without the request or consent of the church, its authority and government, proceeded to an examination of the case.

It was readily admitted by the accused, and the fact was established by evidence, that he denied the supreme divinity of Jesus Christ, and consequently rejected what is commonly called the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of three equal persons in one God.

He also considered it an act of justice to himself, respectful to the Council, and adapted to remove false impressions that had been made upon the publick, briefly to lay open his views upon the subject in question, to state his reasons for his change of opinion, and particularly to make it appear to the Council, and to all that were present, that the charge of *heresy* could not, by *any authority*, be supported against him. Thus he thought it proper, from a regard to his character and standing as a Christian minister, and by the permission and indulgence of the Council, publickly to offer an apology for opinions, which had often been represented as in the highest degree dangerous; and with a view to correct the misapprehensions that pre-

vailed respecting them. He indulged the hope, that his apology would be satisfactory; that, at least, it would so far prevail, as to prevent an immediate and final decision against the pastor; a decision, from which he apprehended the most serious and lasting divisions in the Christian society with which he was connected.

“The Consociation,” after attending to the evidence of facts, the apology of the accused, and the reasoning of the counsel for the complainant, “agreed in the following Result:

“*First.* That the charge against the Rev. Luther Willson, of denying the proper deity of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and consequently the mode of the divine subsistence revealed in the gospel, is supported.

“*Secondly.* That the denial of this doctrine is a departure from the faith once delivered to the saints.

“*Thirdly.* That this denial by the Rev. Luther Willson disqualifies him for the office of a teacher in the Christian church; inasmuch as it is a rejection of an essential part of the counsel of God, a denial of the record God has given of his Son.

“Accordingly, his pastoral office in the churches in our fellowship and connexion is now declared to be ended.”

This Result is so remarkable in several respects, that it ought to be preserved to future generations, as a memorial of the character of the Consociation of Windham County.

The Consociation, rather than to fail of the object for which they were called, when they found that the third step of discipline had not been taken, *assumed* to be the church in Brooklyn. It was expected, from this assumption, that something decisive would be done. The pastor accused was cited to answer to “the crime of heresy;” and it was supposed, that he would either be condemned for *heresy*, and accordingly admonished, or be honourably acquitted. But, it seems, he was neither condemned nor admonished for *heresy*, nor acquitted; but he had inflicted upon him *all the punishment* of the crime that was alleged against him.

The Consociation, after a full examination of the case, did not *presume*, in making out their Result, to declare the pastor *guilty of heresy*; and yet they rejected him. They deprived him (as far as it was in their power to do it) of every privilege that belongs to a Christian minister.

If he were *not guilty of heresy*, what authority had they to reject him? If he *were*, why did they not say it, and give the reasons of their judgment, derived from the scriptures? "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to *this word*, it is because there is no light in them." If the Consociation meant to adhere to the rule of discipline pointed out in the 18th of Matthew, as they professed, why did they not regard it in their decision? Allowing them to be the *church*, as they claimed, why did they not give the pastor an opportunity to *hear the church* upon the subject of his offence, according to the Christian rule,* before they proceeded to *final judgment* in declaring him disqualified for the ministerial and pastoral office? Why did they violate a *plain and sacred rule*, in rejecting him from their fellowship, before they had endeavoured to convince him of his error, and to persuade him to repentance? Did the necessity of the case require such precipitancy, as to induce them to neglect the means, which God had put into their hands for the conviction and reformation of a brother? Or did the members of this venerable Council, in the fulness and benevolence of their hearts, consider his future usefulness and happiness of so little importance, as to be unworthy of an effort for his salvation?

I will here notice the direction of St. Paul to Titus: "A man that is an heretick, after the first and second admonition, reject." This precept is plain, and is as important to be regarded as a mysterious article of faith. If the pastor were *not* a heretick, (as I have before observed,) why did they *reject* him? If he *were*, why did they not *declare* it, and obey the direction of an apostle, in using the means appointed for his conviction? Why did they not administer the repeated and salutary reproof, before they excluded him from their fellowship?† Were they, in

* Says our Saviour, "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." This plainly supposes, that the *church* is to be *heard*; and that the individual is not to be deprived of his standing in the Christian community, until he has *neglected* or *refused* to hear the *church*, whose duty it is to labour with him to effect a reformation in his opinions or conduct, according to his fault. But the Consociation were *not heard*, until the pastor was rejected and dismissed. They must either have considered themselves incompetent to admonish, or have been apprehensive that their admonitions would be effectual, or, what is more probable, they were in too much haste to attend to it. Such was their haste and zeal to accomplish the business for which they came, (the dismissal of the pastor,) that the most obvious and important rules of Christian discipline were comparatively of no account.

† Is it not, beyond a question, the duty of a *church*, or of those who are entrusted with its government, "to admonish an offending member, in order to conviction,"

this respect, unacquainted with their Christian obligations? Or did these infallible interpreters of the mysteries of God esteem it a light thing to disregard his precepts? Are these the pure, the disinterested, the merciful? Or has it become a maxim among Christians, that a *good end* sanctions the *use of unlawful means*?

I will not omit to notice an objection to the tenour of the above remarks, which, I am persuaded, would never have occurred to me, had it not been suggested by individuals since the Result of the Consociation. The Christian precept is, "A man that is an heretick, after the first and second admonition, reject." This precept the Consociation entirely disregarded; for when they assumed the government of the church, they administered *no admonition* before the sentence of *rejection* was pronounced. But it has been said, that the first and second admonition was administered to the accused by his brother Barrett, in taking the first and second steps; and, consequently, that the Consociation, possessing the authority of the church, might with propriety reject him without *any admonition*. This objection shows to what extent the ingenuity of men will carry them in support of a bad cause, or to save themselves from merited reproach. The Consociation manifestly decided, by taking upon themselves the government of the church in Brooklyn, that the church, as a body, were not competent to judge upon the charge of heresy against their pastor. And will it be said, that an *individual* of the church was competent to admonish a pastor for a "crime," of which the *whole church* were not competent to judge? Or will it be said, that the pastor could be admonished for a "crime," of which it was not yet determined, by any competent judgment, that he was guilty? Who, by any legal authority, can admonish an individual for an offence, of which he is not competent to judge; and before the guilt or innocence of the accused has been decided by a proper tribunal?

before he can be deprived of his Christian or pastoral standing? If this view of church discipline be just, (which I cannot think will be disputed,) it was certainly incumbent upon the Consociation, allowing them to be the *church*, or entrusted with its government, as they claimed, to have admonished the pastor, before they removed him from their fellowship in the pastoral office. It was a *necessary* part of discipline (and especially if they viewed his error to be fundamental) to labour for his conviction, with the hope that he might renounce his error, and still be useful to the people of his charge in preaching the gospel of Christ.

The Consociation, in their *proceedings thus far*, (in declaring the pastor disqualified for the ministry, and in rejecting him from their fellowship in the pastoral office,) *novel and extraordinary* as they were, had not yet completed the climax of irregularity and oppression. To finish the work, which they had determined to accomplish, and that the character of their proceedings might be *uniformly irregular throughout*, they completed the exercise of their assumed power over the pastor, by declaring, that "his pastoral relation to the church in Brooklyn, in particular, ought to be, and is hereby dissolved." The Consociation, having assumed the government of the church in Brooklyn without their request or consent, concluded that it was with *them* to determine, whom the church should have, or, rather, whom they should *not* have, for their pastor. Saybrook Platform says expressly, "that *each particular church* hath right to choose their own officers." But the Consociation say, *no*; the church in Brooklyn have *not* a right to choose their own officers. Although this particular church had chosen the *Rev. Luther Willson as their pastor*, and had in no instance manifested a wish for his dismissal, nor had any agency in calling the Consociation to advise or to judge, yet *we* (say the Consociation) *we* determine that *this man* shall *not* be their pastor; "his pastoral relation to the church in Brooklyn ought to be, and is hereby dissolved."*

"In this decision," says the Result, "the Consociation assume no right, and take no liberty, other than is common to all men acting in the same relation and circumstances; the right of exercising their own judgment, and the liberty of obeying God."

This sentence is constructed with *admirable caution*. It is in all respects worthy of the wisdom of the venerable Council that composed it. Any body of men, at this age of the church, in the exercise of the most *arbitrary power*, may use this language with considerable safety; for precedents are numerous, in the history of the church, of the *authority of Councils* against the right of private judg-

* I have, as yet, found nothing in the Platform that authorizes any *earthly power* to take from a church their pastor without their consent. It ought also to be considered, that the members of the church, who applied to the moderator to call the Consociation, did not, in their communication, request the pastor's dismissal; but only that, the case should be determined agreeable to Saybrook Platform.

ment, and in support of the *pretensions of practical infallibility* in matters of faith. Even the Roman Pontiff, issuing his decree, as “vicar of Jesus Christ, and in the name of the Holy Trinity,” would not, I am persuaded, hesitate to say, in support of his *supremacy* in the Catholick church, that he “assumes no right, and takes no liberty, other than is common to *all men, acting in the same relation and circumstances*; the right of exercising his own judgment, and the liberty of obeying God.”

I shall make no further remarks upon the Result, as it respects the *heresy* of the pastor, than just to observe, that the Consociation appear to have been *sincere*; for they declared themselvcs “supported by the consciousness, that a supreme regard to their divine Lord and Master, and a sincere desire to fulfil their covenant engagements to the church, had guided and governed them in their course.” They also, after they had *excluded* the pastor from *every privilege* as a Christian minister, “tenderly admonished him to return to the Christian faith.”

How far the individuals who composed this Council, and who concurred in the decision, acted from the influence of pious and Christian motives, in their impatient zeal to preserve the purity of the orthodox faith, and in pronouncing sentence thus *irregularly* against a pastor for what they considered an essential error, it is not *my* province to judge, or to express an opinion. “There is *one lawgiver*, who is able to save and to destroy.” The time is not far distant, when the pastor that was condemned, and they that condemned him, as unworthy of the ministry, will appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, where every righteous decision on earth will be approved and confirmed, and every unjust judgment be condemned and reversed. At the day of final retribution, the light of another world will exhibit every individual in his true character. “Every work will be brought into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.” “The time is at hand.” “In that day, God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.” “He that is unjust, will be unjust still; and he that is righteous, will be righteous still.”

I now come to the conclusion of the Result, which has respect to a communication made to the Council convened,

containing a request, that they would direct to the choice of a Mutual Council to hear and determine the case of Mr. Willson, and to dissolve his pastoral relation.

“To the venerable Ecclesiastical Council now convened at Brooklyn. to hear and determine on a charge of heresy against the Rev. Luther Willson.

“We the subscribers, parties concerned, viewing it more desirable for the interest of religion, and for the peace of the society in this town, that the case now under consideration should be settled by a Mutual Council, do request the Council now convened, to direct to the choice of such Council to hear and determine the case of Mr. Willson. The business of the Mutual Council shall be to dismiss Mr. Willson, and set him on such ground, as to ministerial character, as they may judge proper. The Council to be chosen shall be of such a character, and chosen on such principles, as shall be approved by the Council now convened.

“For Luther Willson,

J. NELSON.

JOSEPH SCARBOROUGH,
in behalf of the aggrieved Brethren.

JOHN PARISH,
SHUBAEL BROWN,
NATHAN WITTER, Jr.

for the Society.”

“After consultation on this subject, the question, Will you accede to the above proposal? was put, and passed in the affirmative.

“Mr. Willson, on his part, having, in the apprehension of the Consociation, receded from the conciliatory terms in the above agreement, it was voted that the minutes be closed and published.”

From this it seems, that the Consociation and Mr. Willson had made an agreement, the terms of which, on the part of the Consociation, were liberal and conciliatory; and that, notwithstanding the pacifick disposition of this venerable body, Mr. Willson had neither *honour* nor *integrity* sufficient to abide by the agreement which he had

made. I shall here just observe, before I relate the circumstances of the affair, that the Consociation in this instance, as in all their proceedings, fell into a *great mistake*. Mr. W. never made any agreement with the Consociation, to which he did not scrupulously adhere.

I shall now state the principal circumstances, as far as I know them and have been informed, relative to an attempt for a Mutual Council; and relative to the closing part of the Result, in which Mr. W. is represented as "having receded from the conciliatory terms of agreement."

The session of the Consociation at Brooklyn was continued the most of three days. The first day was entirely occupied upon the subject of jurisdiction. The Consociation decided in the evening, that they had jurisdiction in the case. The second day was employed, from early in the morning until late in the evening, in the examination of the case; in hearing the statement and apology of the accused, and the argument of the counsel in support of the complaint. On the morning of the second day, before the trial commenced, the counsel for the complainant, the Hon. Mr. Perkins, of Ashford, and the counsel for the accused, the Rev. Mr. Fiske, of New-Braintree, (Mass.) used their influence and exertions in recommending a Mutual Council to hear and determine the case under consideration, and to dismiss Mr. Willson from his pastoral office. These gentlemen, from a regard to the peace of the society in Brooklyn, urged before the Consociation the reasonableness and expediency of the measure. The Consociation decided, and repeated their decision with emphasis, that they were *imperiously bound* to attend to the complaint. These gentlemen still continued to employ their influence with the parties to effect an agreement for a Council, until all hope of its accomplishment was given up. Late in the evening, the trial was finished.

The next morning, one of the society's committee called at the house of Mr. Willson, and expressed a desire, from a regard to the situation of the society, that an agreement upon a Mutual Council might be effected. Mr. W. observed, that he had always been ready to agree upon a Mutual Council; that a serious, but unsuccessful attempt had been made for that purpose by the counsel of both parties the day before; that enough had been done; that

for his part, he chose that the Consociation should finish the business in their own way ; that they should acquit, or condemn, as they pleased. The gentleman of the committee replied, that he had been conversing with the aggrieved brethren, and that they appeared sincerely and earnestly disposed to agree upon a Mutual Council. Mr. W. answered, that if they were desirous of such an agreement, they certainly could have no objection to coming forward with a proposition ; that he was ready to receive, and to take into consideration, any proposals that they were disposed to make ; that he was entirely averse to offering any terms on *his part*, until he had received proposals from *them*. As they were conversing upon the subject, another of the society's committee came in, and soon after, one of the aggrieved brethren, and also one of their counsel ; all expressing their desire that an agreement for a Mutual Council might take place, with the hope, that if the parties should agree, the Consociation would approve of the measure.

In these circumstances, Mr. Willson indulged the hope, that an agreement upon such a Council to determine the case, and to dissolve his pastoral relation, might possibly be the means of restoring peace to the church, and of preventing unhappy divisions in the society. Accordingly he authorized his counsel, Mr. Fiske, and his friend, Mr. Nelson, to join the parties concerned, and to agree upon such measures as they thought prudent and safe for *him*, and as would also be adapted to promote the interest of religion, and particularly the peace and happiness of the society in Brooklyn.

Mr. Fiske and Mr. Nelson immediately left the house of Mr. W. and joined the committee and the aggrieved brethren in concerting measures for the settlement of the whole affair by a Mutual Council. With the general belief that the Consociation, at this stage of the business, would not be tenacious of exercising the power which they claimed as an ecclesiastical tribunal, the parties forwarded a respectful proposal, containing a request, that the Consociation would direct to the choice of a Mutual Council to dismiss Mr. Willson ; “ the Council to be of such a character, and chosen on such principles, as the Consociation should approve.” This proposal, when handed to the

Consociation by Mr. Nelson, was accompanied *particularly* with a list of names, exhibiting a specimen, or explanation, as to the character of the Council, to which Mr. Willson would agree; that the Consociation might decide at once, whether they would accept the proposal or not. The Consociation did not, however, decide in the presence of the parties, that they would accept, or reject it. And although they ultimately concluded to accept it, (as is declared in the Result,) yet their decision in this respect was never made known to the parties, until the Result was published. It was generally believed, that the character of the Council (as appeared from the list of names) would be acceptable, as they were all Trinitarians, and most or all of them what is commonly called Calvinistick. The names that were presented by Mr. Nelson as a specimen, were as follow, all belonging to Massachusetts :

Rev. Dr. CRANE, of Northbridge,
 Mr. STONE, Brookfield,
 Mr. SNELL, North-Brookfield,
 Dr. PUFFER, Berlin,
 Dr. PARSONS, Amherst,
 Mr. ROCKWOOD, Westborough,
 Mr. BATES, Dedham,
 Mr. FISKE, Wrentham,
 Dr. HOLMES, Cambridge,
 Mr. TOMLINSON, Oakham.

To a Council of this general character, Mr. Willson was ready to agree; and Mr. Nelson, who acted for him in signing the proposal, has repeatedly and expressly declared; that he never gave to the Consociation any intimation, that Mr. Willson would agree to a Council which should be of a character more favourable to their views.

The Consociation therefore, when they received this proposal, received it with the explanation that accompanied it; and consequently, if they acceded to it, had no claim upon Mr. Willson for a Council more orthodox, than was represented by the list of names offered as a specimen. I shall here insert the declaration of the Rev. Mr. Fiske, Mr. W.'s counsel, relative to the same point. This declaration is from Mr. Fiske's own hand, communicated to Mr. W. at his request, and with an expectation that it

would be made publick. "With respect to the phrase in the proposal presented to the Consociation, that 'the Council to be chosen shall be of such a character, and chosen on such principles, as shall be approved by the Council now convened,' it was understood to imply, and was so explained before each party, that the said Council should consist of men holding to the doctrine of the Trinity, and that it should be chosen in a fair and liberal manner, the Consociation being judges of this."

Some members of the Consociation have said, that Mr. Fiske, in settling the manner of choosing the Council, encouraged them to believe, that a "bunch of names," "a plenty of Trinitarian names, would be presented,"* out of which the Consociation might select the number of which the Council was to consist. I think it proper here to remark, that while these members declare that Mr. Fiske gave the fullest encouragement, that a "bunch of names should be presented, out of which the Council might be selected," still they expressly admit, (I have it in writing from their own hand,) that he told them "he had not the *assent* of Mr. Willson to act upon." Allowing, therefore, the statement of these members to be correct, how could Mr. W. be bound to the Consociation to execute the proposal in a particular manner, when the Consociation were expressly informed by his counsel, that he had not *assented* to this method of carrying the proposal into effect? I think it obvious, that in such a case, the agreement, as to the method of choosing the Council, could not be completed, until Mr. W. had *assented*; and to this method, he certainly never *did* assent, either in person, or by proxy.

Whatever was the conversation upon the method of choosing the Council, I have frequently been informed that the conclusion was, that the parties should retire, and that the Consociation would deliberate upon the case, as to accepting the proposal. The parties accordingly retired to a particular apartment of the house in which the Consociation were sitting. After a short time, two gentlemen of the Consociation, appearing as a committee, stated to the parties, that they were not *authorized* to say that the

* The phrase, "bunch of names," and "plenty of Trinitarian names," is the language of gentlemen that were members of the Consociation, used in a letter to Mr. W. The Rev. Mr. Fiske, Mr. W.'s counsel, will not, I presume, acknowledge it to be his.

proposal would be accepted ; but they requested the parties to send in names. Mr. Willson, who had not as yet been present at any part of the conversation, or been acquainted with the process of the business thus far, was now called from his own house, to join the aggrieved brethren, and the committee of the society, in agreeing upon the names of a Council to lay before the Consociation. Mr. Willson, Dea. Scarborough, the agent of the aggrieved brethren, and the committee of the society, soon met, and agreed upon a Mutual Council. The number of pastors of which the Council was to consist was nine. They were the following ; six in Massachusetts, and three in Connecticut :

Rev. Dr. CRANE, *of Northbridge.*
 Mr. SNELL, *North-Brookfield,*
 Mr. STONE, *Brookfield,*
 Mr. ELY, *Monson,*
 Dr. HOLMES, *Cambridge,*
 Mr. FISKE, *Wrentham,*
 Mr. NOTT, *Franklin,*
 Mr. Mc EWEN, *New-London,*
 Mr. NELSON, *Lisbon.*

The names were handed to the Consociation by Mr. Willson, all parties being present, and *expressly declaring their concurrence.* The parties then retired ; Mr. Willson to his own house, with no other expectation, than that the Consociation would approve and confirm the choice, or reject the proposition, and finish the business, as if no proposal had been made. After a few minutes, one of the society's committee handed to Mr. Willson, as he was at dinner, a small piece of paper, containing the following words : "Three more names." Neither the paper, nor the gentleman who handed it, could give any explanation of its meaning. It was not inquired, who sent it ; nor was it mentioned. Mr. W. conjectured, that it came from Dea. Scarborough, one of the parties in the choice of the Council. But as the paper was not directed to him, and was not signed by any one, and he did not know (nor could Mr. Fiske and Mr. Nelson, who were present, inform him) that he was under any obligation to furnish more names, he sent the paper back to the person, or place, from whence it came, with this answer : that he was satis-

fied with the names upon which the parties had agreed, and that he had no more to offer.

It was not long before it was intimated to Mr. W. that the Consociation considered his sending back the paper as he did, an *insult*. Unable to conjecture what could be the import of these indications, he immediately requested Mr. Nelson, who signed the proposal in his behalf, and was acquainted with the general process of the business, to go to the Consociation, and, if what had been intimated were true, to ascertain the offence, in order that the circumstances might be explained, and properly understood. Mr. Nelson accordingly went; and as soon as he had opened the door where this venerable body were in session, and before he had time to introduce the subject of his message, he was *significantly* informed, that they could not be interrupted.* Meeting with this repulse, and averse to any thing that should appear like intrusion, he immediately retired, without accomplishing the business for which he went.

After Mr. Nelson's return, Mr. Willson, and Mr. Parish, one of the society's committee, made an attempt to gain admittance to the presence of the Consociation, with the hope of rectifying the mistake, or misunderstanding, that had unfortunately occurred. With difficulty they entered the room. The members of the Consociation, having finished their business, were all standing, and appeared to be preparing to move to the meeting-house. As soon as Mr. W. and Mr. P. had entered the door, there seemed to be a *particular commotion*, and, as far as the countenances of men are an index of their feelings, an evident aversion with many, and particularly the moderator, to hear or to notice any thing that they were about to say. Mr. W. observed, that an intimation had been given that the Consociation considered his sending back the paper as he did, highly disrespectful; that he was very sorry such an impression should be received; that no disrespect was intended; that he did not know that the paper came from them. Mr. Parish also stated, that he understood there was a mistake about names, and that they wished to have

* Mr. Nelson has expressly and repeatedly declared, and is ready to certify it with the solemnity of an oath, that the appearance of this body, at the time he entered the room, was *extremely repulsive*; that they manifested a degree of excitement and irritation not to have been expected in a deliberative assembly.

it corrected ; but such was the commotion, that it was difficult for Mr. W. and Mr. P. to be heard. When they entered the room, the face of the moderator was directly towards them ; but he immediately turned, and apparently directed his attention to other objects, as if he were determined *not* to hear. In their solicitude to address the moderator, the Rev. Mr. Underwood, a member of the Council, who appeared equally solicitous that they might have opportunity to be heard, called to the moderator, two or three times, to arrest his attention. At length, the Rev. moderator turned to Mr. Willson and Mr. Parish, and, in a manner highly expressive of his dignity, as presiding officer of this respectable body, put an end to all further communications, by declaring, that “the minutes of the Consociation were closed, and there was no farther hearing upon the subject.” At this peremptory reply, Mr. W. and Mr. P. were disposed to retire as soon as possible, and immediately withdrew. Thus ended the attempt to come to an explanation of the circumstance that so highly offended this honourable Council.

In this decision of the moderator, his manner was so striking and impressive, as not easily to be forgotten. His posture was erect ; his countenance was *highly animated* ; and there was much of the *sublime* in the tone and modulation of his voice.

I shall now offer what I suppose to be the *true reason* why the Consociation were so *decided* and *absolute* in refusing an explanation.

An individual, at that time a member of the Consociation, has since stated, that soon after the paper was returned without more names, (the circumstance which gave so great offence,) the aggrieved brethren, one of the parties that had *agreed* upon a Mutual Council, went into the room where the Consociation were together, and desired them not to consent to the Council proposed. Here the *secret* is brought to light. The aggrieved brethren, by their agent, had signed the proposal for a Mutual Council, and had expressly agreed before the Consociation to the names that were presented by Mr. Willson. But as soon as the other parties were absent, and they found that Mr. W. had given offence by not sending more names, they privately requested the Consociation *not* to consent to the

Council, upon which they had *explicitly and publickly agreed*: And this request (without the knowledge or consent of the other parties) has been declared by a member of the Consociation, to be the *reason* why they did not wait for an explanation of the misunderstanding about names.

The Consociation thought it proper, in their Result, publickly to attribute the failure of a Mutual Council to Mr. Willson, by charging him with receding from a conciliatory agreement; while they *conceal* the fact, that the *true reason* of this failure was owing to the *private request* of the aggrieved brethren. Thus the Consociation had so much respect to the private views and wishes of these brethren, as to countenance a direct violation of their *explicit and publick agreement*, and as *charitably to cover* their dishonesty and deceit.*

From these facts, in what light does the character of the Consociation appear, professing themselves to have acted from an impressive sense of responsibility to their Lord, and to have been governed by the influence and spirit of his religion?

This *venerable Council*, with all the pretensions of Christian candour and impartiality, and with the imposing solemnity of a serious and deliberate Result, appear, in this instance, to have acted with a *particular design* to excite suspicion against the *morality* of the man, whom they had rejected from their fellowship. It was evidently their object, in declaring their opinion that Mr. Willson had receded from the terms of a conciliatory agreement, to fix an impression upon the society in Brooklyn and upon the publick, that the aggrieved brethren, the committee of the society, and the Consociation, were all (for the sake of peace) in favour of a Mutual Council; but that Mr. Willson was so far deficient in moral rectitude and conciliatory principles, as to recede from the agreement which he had made. *Such management*, in any other assembly than a

* It appears that the aggrieved brethren, as a party in the trial, and in the affair of a Mutual Council, were highly favoured. They were admitted to the secret counsels of the Consociation; and their private request, though in direct violation of their publick agreement, was a sufficient authority for the Consociation to act upon. What a sympathy and friendship between this orthodox and venerable tribunal, and those good brethren, who invited them to come to Brooklyn and pronounce sentence upon their heretical pastor!

Consociation, could not be entitled to a more honourable name than *political collusion*.

And are these the men to whom are committed the *keys of the kingdom*; to receive or to exclude whom *they* in their high prerogatives shall *ordain*? Is it the peculiar privilege of *Christians who are sound in the faith*, to be deficient in good works, and to *practise dissimulation*, because of their pretensions and pre-eminence in the knowledge of mysteries? What says our Saviour? "Not every one that *saith* unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that *doeth* the will of my Father which is in heaven."

I shall now point out the *unreasonableness* and *folly* of the Consociation, in being offended at Mr. W.'s sending back the paper without more names.

1. The nine gentlemen, agreed upon by all parties to compose the Council, were so *completely* answerable to the *character* of the list of names offered by Mr. Nelson as a specimen, that when the Consociation wrote upon the paper, "three more names," they did not intimate an objection to the *principles* or *character* of an individual of the Council upon which the parties had agreed. A call, therefore, for more names was disingenuous and unreasonable, unless they could offer some objection to the character of the persons whose names had been presented; or had stated that the character of several who were in the list was *unknown* to them.

2. The paper handed to Mr. W. had no form, by which it could be considered as exhibiting a *claim* or *demand* upon him for *any thing*. It was not directed to him; nor had it any signature, by which he could know from whence it came. If the Consociation had any communication to make in writing, requesting more names, it ought to have been made to the *parties* jointly and mutually concerned, and to have been signed officially by the scribe or moderator. But it was not made to the parties that subscribed the proposal, (one of which, without the others, was not competent to an agreement,) nor was it made to *either party* in any form that was intelligible. And, surely, a paper which was not directed to the *parties jointly*, or to *either party*, nor signed by the moderator, scribe, or a committee of the Consociation, could have no more *authority*, or furnish

any more claim upon Mr. Willson, than a piece of paper *entirely blank*.

If the Consociation, in making a communication to Mr. Willson, had not time, or did not think it of importance enough, to give it their signature, that he might know from whom it came, I should suppose their sense of propriety might have readily suggested an excuse for not sending more names, and have saved their extreme susceptibility and keen resentments.

3. The Consociation had no *claim* upon Mr. Willson for more names upon *any principle whatever*. This was expressly declared, at the time the paper was presented, by the Rev. Messrs. Fiske and Nelson, who were the only agents on the part of Mr. W. in making or settling proposals for a Mutual Council.*

* The following is the testimony of the Rev. Mr. Fiske, who was acquainted with all the important facts, and the whole process of the business, relative to the affair of a Mutual Council. This testimony was communicated to Mr. W. at his request, in September following the result of the Consociation, and a short time before the convening of the Council that dismissed him from his pastoral relation to the society in Brooklyn.

“With respect to that part of the Result of Consociation, wherein they charge Mr. Willson with being the cause of preventing a transfer of the question pending before that body to a Mutual Council, by his receding from the terms of agreement, which he desires to have set in its proper light before the Council about to be convened—I can speak with the utmost confidence; and feel no hesitation in asserting, that Mr. Willson was not the voluntary cause of preventing it, however it might be conceived of by the Consociation.

“After Mr. Willson had consented to refer the matter in question to a Mutual Council, consisting of Trinitarians, the business was managed for him, both with the aggrieved and with the Consociation, wholly by the Rev. Mr. Nelson and myself, until Mr. Willson was called from his own house to make choice of the Council.

“With respect to the phrase in the proposal presented to the Consociation, ‘the Council to be chosen, shall be of such a character, and chosen on such principles, as shall be approved by the Consociation now convened,’ it was understood to imply, and was so explained before each party, that the said Council should consist of men holding to the doctrine of the Trinity; and that it should be chosen in a fair and liberal manner, the Consociation being judges of this. It was expressly agreed within the Consociation, that if any objections were to be made to any person nominated by Mr. Willson, they should be made openly, all parties being present. Upon Mr. Willson’s arrival at Capt. Tyler’s, he immediately, and without hesitation, proceeded to make out a list of names for the Council, the aggrieved having an equal voice in this choice, which list was handed in to the Consociation according to their direction. I was with Mr. Willson the whole of the time of his stay at Capt. Tyler’s, and am certain that he did not there do any thing that could give colour to the above Result.

“With respect to the circumstance of a paper, which was afterwards presented to Mr. Willson, while at dinner at his own table, having this inscription, ‘three more names,’ it was apparent from Mr. Willson’s immediate declaration, that he did not understand that it came from the Consociation; and, with due respect to that body, I would say, that I conceive, from the terms of the agreement, very definitely stated, they had no demand on Mr. Willson for one more name. Upon learning, however, that the Consociation had received unfavourable impressions, on account of the return of the aforesaid paper, without the names as required, Mr. Nelson instantly repaired to Capt. Tyler’s to give an explanation; and, within a very few minutes, Mr. Willson himself went with the same design, as he then declared. What *there* took place, others must testify. This gives my view of the subject so far as it can be done in few

Having related the principal circumstances and ultimate failure of an attempt for a Mutual Council, I shall close with a few observations upon the "agreement," from which Mr. Willson is said to have receded.

The Consociation declare in their Result, that they acceded to the proposition for a Mutual Council; but that "Mr. Willson, on his part, in their apprehension, receded from the conciliatory terms in the agreement." I think it proper here to observe, that if the Consociation had acceded to the proposal, it was a fact *known only to themselves*. It was not made known to the parties, until they published their Result.

The Consociation, referring to their *acceptance* of the proposal, speak of it as an *agreement*. But how could their acceding to the proposal be considered as an agreement with Mr. Willson, while it was to *him*, and to the *committee* of the society, (two of the parties,) an *entire secret*? The fact, that the Consociation had acceded to the proposal, was not made known to them in writing, by a committee, or in any manner whatever, until the Result was read in publick. And will the Consociation pretend an *agreement* with Mr. W. before they had *informed* him of their *acceptance* of his proposal? The only agreement, on the part of Mr. Willson, to which the Result refers, is contained in the proposition, in which he was jointly and mutually concerned with others. From this proposition he did *not recede*; for he never manifested a wish to *alter*, or to *withdraw* it. And if the *acceptance* of the proposal was an *agreement* on the part of the Consociation, why was not the agreement carried into effect? The failure certainly was not on *his* part, but *their's*.*

The truth of the case is, that the proposal of Mr. Willson in connexion with the other parties, though it was presented to the Consociation, could not be *binding* upon him

words. I have endeavoured to state the case as it was. In regard to this particular point, I have no hesitation in declaring to all men my conviction of Mr. Willson's entire innocence of what is charged upon him.

JOHN FISKE.

"*New-Braintree, Sept 13, 1817.*"

* It will be recollected, that, when the Consociation speak of an *agreement*, from which Mr. W. is charged with receding, they could not mean an agreement with the other parties connected with him in the proposal; because *all parties* agreed to the list of names that was presented, and *openly declared* their agreement before the Consociation. And none will pretend that Mr. W. ever suggested the thought of receding from this list, in which he and the other parties had expressly concurred.

in the sense of an *agreement*, until they had accepted it, and their acceptance was *made known* to him. I am therefore constrained to repeat, what I have said before, that when the Consociation charged Mr. W. with receding from the terms of agreement, they, in this instance, as in all their proceedings, fell into a *great mistake*. And, what was the *worst* of all, because they were offended at a circumstance which they would not suffer to be explained, they employed *deception*, in publicly attributing the failure of a Mutual Council to one that was *innocent*, and in *concealing* the conduct of those that were *actually guilty*.

In view of the whole affair of the proceedings and Result of the Consociation, what must be the opinion of the serious and candid? Where is the wisdom, integrity, and disinterestedness of this Christian assembly? In what part of the history of their proceedings do we discover the important and inseparable connexion between *faith and works*?—a connexion which Christianity has *established*, and which is not to be regarded with indifference and neglect.

What can we think of the injustice and dissimulation that are sometimes employed with all the solemnity and sanctions of religion, to answer the purpose of a party? Are these the means which Christianity has authorized, to preserve the purity and peace of the church? How far the piety and sincerity of a Christian may be accompanied, in particular cases, with an intolerant and exclusive spirit, it is not within the province of human wisdom to decide. But when this spirit has gained a powerful ascendancy in the character of an individual, or of a deliberative assembly; when *faith* is exalted above *works*, *orthodoxy* above *charity*, and *oppression* above *law*; and when the purposes of Christian piety are to be promoted by *artifice and collusion*—it is time for the friends of religious liberty to awake and inquire; to understand and to estimate the worth of their Christian rights; and against every claim of usurpation, every effort of arbitrary power, to stand firmly in their defence.

What must be our opinion of that system of intolerance and despotism, which aspires to supreme dominion in the church?—a system that would bind “souls in fetters;” that aims at nothing short of the imprisonment of the human mind; that calls upon the sincere inquirer after truth,

to lay aside his understanding, and to resign the liberty, the *atmosphere* of a free spirit? Patiently to acquiesce in such an attempt upon our Christian and unalienable rights, is virtually to renounce the faith; to abandon the highest interests of the religion we profess; and, instead of adhering to the *authority of our Master who is in heaven*, tamely to submit our consciences to the fallible guidance of *human authority*, to the high and imperious claims of *ecclesiastical domination*.

In closing this review of the proceedings of the Consociation of Windham County, I shall not be satisfied without expressing a favourable opinion of the character of *individuals* of that ecclesiastical body, with whom I have been personally acquainted; whose piety and Christian attainments, as well as general usefulness, I still hold in respectful estimation. Though the whole Consociation are necessarily included in the general censure contained in the review, I still feel a degree of satisfaction in the belief, that several of that body had so much discernment and Christian moderation, as not to concur in the Result. And even with respect to those that concurred in it, it is not for me to determine how far, in this particular instance, they might be actuated by a persecuting spirit, through a blind and impatient zeal for the honour of their Saviour; and yet, in their general disposition and deportment, have a fair claim to the character of sincere Christians. I remember the example of James and John, the disciples of Jesus, who thought to recommend themselves to their Master by their zeal to destroy the Samaritans. These disciples supposed that they were offering the highest proof of friendship and fidelity to their Lord, in asking his permission, "that they might command fire to come down from heaven to consume the Samaritans," because of their disrespect to him, in refusing him an entrance into their village. But Jesus rebuked them, informing them, that "they knew not what manner of spirit they were of;" and "that the Son of Man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." In this we have an example of a spirit of persecution in the disciples of Jesus, acting under the influence of a high respect for the honour of their Lord. This spirit is directly opposed to the spirit of Christ, and to the nature and genius of his religion; and when it becomes a habitual and

governing principle, and whether it fastens its malignant power upon the *characters* or *lives* of men, it is, in my apprehension, infinitely more dangerous and destructive in its effects upon those that are governed by it, than a mere error of opinion upon the subject of the Trinity.

The ministers and brethren of the Council at Brooklyn, will not, I hope, be offended at an expression of my regard for their usefulness and happiness in their several stations. As an expression of my best wishes for their influence and success in the cause of Christian piety and benevolence, I now take my leave of them, praying that they may possess “the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” “And this I pray, that their love may abound yet more and more in knowledge, and in all judgment; that they may approve things that are excellent; that they may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.” “That they may put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another; and, above all things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness;” and that, “whatsoever they do, in word or deed,” they may “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

After the Result of the Consociation, Mr. W. the junior pastor, in view of the circumstances attending his situation, did not think it advisable to continue his publick services in the character of a Christian teacher, as he had done before. The advice of friends, whose judgment he respected, in agreement with his own opinion, induced him to suspend, at least for a time, the performance of some of the ordinary and appropriate duties of his pastoral office. Mr. W. from the information he had obtained, (though his information, from the short time he had to acquire it, was not so particular and extensive as he wished,) was, in general, satisfied, that the Consociation had not jurisdiction, according to what is called the constitution of the churches, the fair principles of ecclesiastical usage, and the obvious rules of Christian discipline. But different opinions respecting the power of the Consociation were confidently expressed. From this diversity of opinion,

Mr. W. was not without apprehension, that the civil authority would ultimately recognize their decision, and subject him to the inconvenience of a dismissed minister. He therefore thought it safe and expedient, considering his limited acquaintance with the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of the state, to omit his usual services upon the sabbath, until the church, or society, at a publick meeting, should formally and expressly claim them; or until he could have time more fully to inform himself upon the subject. He adopted this course, rather than to put at hazard his reputation and future prospects, in leading the way to a doubtful contest in law.

I will here add, that Mr. W. considered it best for himself, and for the society with which he was connected, so far to regard the Result of the Consociation, as to take measures for his regular dismissal, by calling a Mutual Council to dissolve his pastoral relation, and to place him in fair standing as a Christian minister in the congregational churches of our country. Weary of a controversy that had been continued, on the part of the opposition, with the most subtle and obstinate perseverance; entertaining no hope that the opposition would cease; and apprehending that the Result of the Consociation might strengthen and increase the disaffection that existed, as it was undoubtedly intended by those that formed it; he thought it best for the society, that they should consent to his dismissal, and use their endeavours to obtain another minister, in whom they would probably be more united. The individuals to whom he expressed his sentiments upon this subject, were of a different opinion. They considered, that the adoption of such a measure would be paying too much respect to *usurpation*—to an *assumed ecclesiastical dominion*, that had no countenance in reason, religion, or law.

Mr. W. considering himself as a party, and having a regard to his professional character and standing in the Christian community, did not think it expedient to take upon himself the responsibility of publicly bidding defiance to the decision of an ecclesiastical body, respectable for the number and general character of its members, and high in its claims of jurisdiction. With whatever confidence he might have relied upon the general support of the society

of which he was a pastor, yet this would not relieve him in his publick character as a minister, beyond the limits of his own parish.

I believe it will be generally agreed, that the Consociation, who publickly denounced Mr. W. as disqualified for the ministry, had actually injured him, in an ecclesiastical point of view, in his professional rights. And on the principle, that the Consociation had no proper or constitutional authority to depose him from his pastoral office, yet their decision, as a publick act, had all the solemnity of a legal proceeding. Mr. W. in this view of his situation, considered it most prudent, and most consistent with general principles of order, not to appear immediately before the publick as judge in his own case, in open contempt of the Result of the Consociation, but to appeal to a regular ecclesiastical tribunal; to an association of ministers, or a council of churches, to take cognizance of his case, and to determine his standing. This he believed to be the proper method of obtaining relief from the injury he had sustained by the publick act of the Consociation. He therefore concluded to suspend his publick discourses, and, in due time, to obtain the examination and decision of a regular Council, relative to his Christian and ministerial rights.

On the 3d of March, a society meeting was held, at which the society expressed their minds in a manner very decided and full against the assumed power and the proceedings of the Consociation. They declared, by vote, their determination not to unite with the church in obtaining or settling another minister, until the church should publickly renounce all connexion with the Consociation of Windham County, annul their vote upon the doctrine of the Trinity, and put themselves on the ground of the covenant, as before said vote was passed; the *only* covenant that had been in use as a test of faith in order to communion.

They also voted, that no persons should hold religious meetings in the meeting-house, except the ministers of the society, and of the Eastern Association of the County of Windham, without leave obtained of the society, or of their committee, appointed for the purpose of granting permission, when they should judge proper.

In consequence of the scruples of Mr. Willson as to the expediency of continuing his publick discourses upon the sabbath, until his case should be revised by a regular Ecclesiastical Council; and in consequence of the infirmities of the senior pastor, who was not able to perform the publick offices of a Christian minister; the society had been without publick worship for several sabbaths. In this view of their situation, they were apprehensive that the individuals who had been instrumental in procuring a decision against the junior pastor, would make an attempt to introduce into the meeting-house, ministers and meetings of their own choice. Against any officiousness, or interference of this kind, the society thought it prudent to provide, by a publick declaration of their rights, and by the adoption of decisive and efficient measures.

On the day of the meeting of the society, before the meeting was formed, Mr. W. the junior pastor, expressed a wish to several individuals, that the society would dispense with his publick services, in the capacity of a Christian teacher, until he should have opportunity to obtain all the information that was desirable, to settle the question relative to the jurisdiction and powers of the Consociation, to his entire satisfaction. The society, conforming to his wishes, did not request him to enter upon the appropriate duties of publick instruction, although they were particular to recognize him distinctly as their minister. They also appointed a committee, at his request, to unite with him, and to propose to the church to unite, in adopting proper measures to place him in fair standing in the Christian ministry, (in opposition to the Result of the Consociation,) not as a minister of the church and society in Brooklyn, but as one duly qualified for the office of a Christian teacher.

Mr. W. viewing the Consociation somewhat in the light of an *ex parte* council, believed it in a degree necessary to obtain the decision of another Council, that would, at least, be as competent to *restore* him to his standing in the ministry, as the Consociation was to *depose* him. And he requested the society to unite with him in pursuance of this object, that, whatever might be the result of the difficulties at Brooklyn, and of his connexion with the society of which he was pastor, he might not essentially suffer in his

ministerial character in view of the publick, in consequence of the Result of the Council that claimed the authority of deposing him from the ministry, and of dismissing him from his pastoral relation to the church.

In a short time after the society meeting, Mr. W. received a written communication from a large number of the inhabitants of the society, containing a request that publick worship might no longer be discontinued; that he would go into the meeting-house, and perform the usual services of the sabbath, except that he might read printed sermons of other authors, rather than deliver those of his own composition. In this communication, they were particular in declaring their opinion, that he had an undoubted right to administer to them in the official capacity of a publick teacher; but at the same time, they were willing, in conformity to his views, to dispense with his discourses in the office of publick instruction, until something farther could be done. Mr. W. immediately complied with their request.

At length, Mr. W. being absent on the week of the annual fast, (early in April,) the Rev. Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, who had not attended publick worship for more than a year, (except in two instances, when the junior pastor exchanged,) came out, and performed the ministerial service on the day of the publick fast, and so continued to do upon sabbaths. He was not, however, able to deliver more than one discourse upon a sabbath in connexion with the other usual exercises of half the day. He evidently appeared in publick, to put a stop to all farther services of Mr. W. He openly and repeatedly expressed his disapprobation of Mr. W.'s reading sermons, and leading in the devotional exercises of the congregation; declaring that it had a tendency to keep up divisions; though he could find no fault, from any information that he had received, with the sermons that had been read, or with any peculiarities in the devotional exercises of Mr. W. as having such a tendency. Mr. W. still being desired by many to continue his publick exercises every sabbath, on that part of the day which was not occupied by the senior pastor, he continued, in accordance with the former written request, to read sermons, and to lead in the usual religious exercises of the congregation. Thus Dr. W.

continued to preach, and Mr. W. to read sermons, for a considerable time.

Not far from the 20th of May, Mr. W. and the committee had a meeting to take into consideration suitable measures to be adopted to place him in regular standing, as one qualified to preach the gospel. After due consultation, they supposed it proper to call an Ecclesiastical Council for that purpose. But being anxious that the divisions in the church and society might be healed; that the parties at variance might be reconciled, and peace and tranquillity be again restored upon those liberal principles, which had always been the bond of union in the choice of a minister, and in the enjoyment of Christian privileges; they concluded to request the appointment of a society meeting, that they might report to the society the result of their deliberations, and, particularly, propose a method of reconciliation, which they hoped the society, the aggrieved brethren, and the church, would readily approve. A society meeting was held, and the committee made their report, proposing a method for the settlement of difficulties. The report was approved and accepted by a vote of the society. The report and acceptance were as follow :

“ At a meeting of the society agreeable to the foregoing warning, on the 12th of June, 1817, Capt. Shubael Brown, Moderator—

“ *Voted*, to accept the following Report, viz.

‘ *To the Inhabitants of the First Ecclesiastical Society in the town of Brooklyn, now legally assembled in society meeting.*

‘ We the subscribers, the committee appointed by said society to agree with the Rev. Luther Willson, upon such measures, as we should think proper to be adopted to restore him to a regular standing in the Christian ministry, as one qualified to preach the gospel; and also to propose to the church to concur with us in the measure, and for the purpose aforesaid; and authorized by a vote of the society to carry into effect such measures as we should deem necessary in the matters aforesaid; have thought it best, from a view of our present situation, before we proceed to act in the case, to lay before the society the result of our deliberations upon the subject.

‘ We therefore state to the society, that, upon due consideration of the trust committed to us, we have agreed with the Rev. Mr. Willson, that it is expedient to call an Ecclesiastical Council, to examine the proceedings and Result of the late Consociation held in February last, and to declare in favour of his regular standing in the Christian ministry, in opposition to their Result, should they find, upon examination, that the proceedings and Result of said Consociation were not in conformity to ecclesiastical usage, and to the rules and maxims of the Christian religion. We have come to such a conclusion and agreement, from a regard to the request of Mr. Willson, from a conviction of the propriety and importance of such a measure upon general principles of order, and with a view to place him in good standing, as a Christian teacher, in the congregational churches of our country. Viewing the decision of the late Consociation, touching the ministerial character of Mr. Willson, (declaring him disqualified for the office of a teacher in the Christian church,) unauthorized and unjust, we think it proper, agreeable to order, and for the honour of religion, to call a regular Ecclesiastical Council to take cognizance of the case, and to place the character of Mr. Willson on such ground, as they may deem consistent with their duty and responsibility, and the general interest of religion. While we agree in the above measure as proper to be adopted, and carried into execution, we still wish it to be waved, and the execution of it deferred, (if it may be thought best,) until one attempt more is made, upon what we consider just and conciliatory principles, for the reconciliation of the parties at variance, and for the restoration of peace and order in this religious society.

‘ We therefore beg leave respectfully to submit to the consideration of this society, with the hope of their approbation and sanction, what we consider a reasonable and honourable method of healing and terminating existing difficulties among us, so far as these difficulties arise from a division with respect to the Rev. Mr. Willson. We therefore, in agreement with Mr. Willson, suggest and propose the following, as the most probable method that occurs to us (should it be adopted by all concerned) of restoring peace and tranquillity to the people in this place. With a view to an object so important as the union of this church

and society in the choice and support of a Christian minister, we think it expedient and absolutely necessary, that the church declare themselves entirely disconnected with the Consociation of Windham County, which pretend to claim jurisdiction over them; that they also annul the vote upon the doctrine of the Trinity, passed February, 1816, and put themselves on the covenant, as before said vote was passed; and unite with the society in calling the Council that ordained Mr. Willson,* to examine into the proceedings and Result of the Consociation with respect to him, to dissolve his pastoral relation to this people, and to recommend him, or not, in the character of a Christian teacher, as they shall judge proper. We have been induced and have presumed to recommend the above measure, from the hope, that those who are opposed to Mr. Willson's ministry, would readily concur in it; and from the conviction, that the dismissal of Mr. W. upon the aforesaid proposals being complied with, and upon the fair principles of impartiality and mutual agreement, would contribute to the interest and happiness of this religious society.

“Should the method proposed meet the approbation of the parties concerned, we should indulge the hope of seeing this people again united in the choice of a minister, upon those conciliatory and liberal principles, which we had ever considered the basis and bond of union among

* The Council that ordained Mr. Willson was proposed, because this Council was known, and had been uniformly acknowledged by all parties, to be Trinitarian. The aggrieved brethren and the church could therefore unite in this Council, without subjecting themselves to the imputation of renouncing their Trinitarian principles. It was hoped and believed, that, for the sake of peace upon fair principles, and of union with the society in the choice of a minister, they would at once be satisfied with the same Council to dismiss Mr. Willson, in which they readily united to ordain him. The proposition was ultimately laid before them, but they did not agree to it.

The aggrieved brethren considered the *Consociation* a very suitable Council to dismiss Mr. W. from his pastoral relation to the *church*, though, with a single exception, the pastors that composed that Council (several of them the nearest neighbours to Brooklyn) were treated by the church, at the time when arrangements were made for his ordination, with open neglect. None of them (except one) were invited by the church to assist in his ordination, because they were considered Hopkinsians. But when these Hopkinsians had joined a few of the good people in Brooklyn, in their endeavours to excite the opinion of the publick against their junior pastor for his Arian heresy, (as it was called,) they were thought to be the *best men* and *best judges* that could be employed to take cognizance of his errors, and to pronounce sentence against him as a dangerous man. And besides, these ministers (if they had not offered their services in the work of judgment) were very willing to come at the request of their brethren, with whom they most cordially sympathized, and for whose relief they felt it their duty to unite their most faithful and persevering exertions.

this people. Should the method of reconciliation proposed, be approved by the society and obtain their sanction, but meet with opposition from those who have been accustomed to style themselves the aggrieved; or should the aggrieved approve of the plan suggested, and concur with the society, and yet the church refuse to act upon it; we submit to the consideration of the society, the propriety and expediency of uniting with the Rev. Mr. Willson, in calling an Ecclesiastical Council, as soon as may be convenient, to take cognizance and determine in regard to his ministerial character, to express their opinion upon subjects of interest and importance to the society, and to afford us their advice in our present situation. All which is submitted by your humble servants,

| | | |
|---|---|------------|
| <i>Roger W. Williams,</i> <i>John Parish,</i> <i>Aaron Davison,</i> <i>John Williams,</i> <i>Joab Fasset,</i> <i>Benjamin Gilbert,</i> <i>Nathan Witter, Jun.</i> | } | Committee. |
|---|---|------------|

‘The above approved and concurred in.

‘LUTHER WILLSON.

‘*Brooklyn, June 12th, 1817.*’

“The above is a true copy of record.

“ELEAZER MATHER, *Society Clerk.*

“*June 23d, 1818.*”

The society, upon their acceptance of this report of their committee, passed a vote, “that they would unite with the church in calling a Council to dismiss Mr. Willson, provided the aggrieved brethren would agree with the other members of the church, in declaring the church entirely disconnected with the Consociation of Windham County, who claimed jurisdiction over them; also annul their vote respecting the doctrine of the Trinity, and put themselves on the covenant, as before said vote was passed; and unite with the society in calling the Council that ordained Mr. Willson, to dissolve his pastoral relation to the people in Brooklyn, to examine into the proceedings and Result of the Consociation with respect to him, and to recommend

him, or not, in the character of a Christian minister, as they should judge proper."

A committee was appointed by the society to lay the vote containing the above proposition before the aggrieved brethren and Dr. Whitney, and afterwards (if they thought proper) before the church, to see if they would agree to the proposition. The committee were to use their endeavours to effect a reconciliation and agreement, and to report to the society. The society meeting was adjourned to the 26th of June. At the adjourned meeting, the committee made their report. No agreement was effected. The aggrieved brethren, Dr. Whitney, and the church, would not agree to the proposition on the part of the society.

The church had a meeting, previous to the adjourned meeting of the society, on the same day; at which they expressed their disapprobation of Mr. Willson's performing publick services on the sabbath, as he had done for some time, in reading sermons, and leading in the exercises of publick worship.* The society voted, immedi-

* The vote of the church, attested at the time it was passed, was as follows :

" June 26, 1817—*Voted*, That they" (the church) "disapproved of Mr. Willson's officiating on sabbaths, as he had done for some time past.

" Attest,

JOSIAH WHITNEY, *Pastor*."

The following was the vote of the church, as it was entered upon the book of records by the Rev. Dr. Whitney, their pastor : " The following question was put to the church—Do you approve or disapprove of Mr. Willson's going into the meeting-house, and officiating on sabbaths, as he has done for some time past, since his dismissal by the Consociation ? Voted in the negative."

It will be observed, that the pastor, in entering the vote of the church upon the book of records, added the following important clause, " since his dismissal by the Consociation." By this addition, the records represent the church as having recognized, by their vote, the jurisdiction of the Consociation, and the correctness of their decision, relative to the ministerial character of the junior pastor ; whereas the church had never, by any publick act, directly acknowledged the authority of the Consociation in the case of Mr. Willson ; and the senior pastor himself, only a few years before, by his concurrence in the vote of an Association, which was moved by him, expressly declared his determination to resist the claims of the Consociation, as an unscriptural and unauthorized tribunal. (See the vote of the Association, page 64 of this Review.)

The above is one of several important instances of an incorrect record, made by the Rev. Dr. Whitney, the pastor of the church. I mention this instance, as I have before mentioned omissions, that the next generation (should it ever come to a knowledge of this review) may not rely with implicit confidence upon the records of the church, as containing a correct and entire representation of its proceedings in the late controversy respecting the junior pastor.

It is with serious regret that I have had occasion to make use of the name of the Rev. Dr. Whitney, as having a part in the history of the late controversy. The part that he has taken in the late difficulty at Brooklyn, was what Mr. W. the junior pastor could never have expected, from his acquaintance and connexion with him for several years in the duties of the pastoral office. Until the late controversy commenced, the pastors had been associated, as was supposed by Mr. W. in entire friendship and cordiality, notwithstanding their difference of opinion, for some time before

ately after, to request Mr. Willson to preach, in the same manner as he did previously to the meeting of the Consociation, when the pulpit was not occupied by Dr. W. the senior pastor. Mr. W. having become entirely satisfied, that the Consociation had no jurisdiction that could affect his pastoral relation to the society, who claimed him as their minister, was ready to perform the publick duties of a minister at their request.

The individuals who moved that Mr. Willson should be requested to preach, had not the least expectation, at the time the motion was made, that Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, would be able to preach more than half the day, each sabbath; as he had repeatedly declared, that he could not preach more than one sermon a day. But to prevent Mr. W. from preaching, he, from that time, continued to perform the morning and evening services of every sabbath through the summer. At the advanced age of eighty-five, he literally endured the burden and heat of the day through the warm season, except in two instances, when he introduced other gentlemen to preach, directly contrary to a vote of the society in March, and a publick request of the society in June.

By every possible management of the aggrieved brethren at their private meetings, after their attempts to accomplish their purpose at publick meetings had failed; by the effects produced from the Result of the Consociation; and by the private and publick influence of Dr. Whitney, the senior pastor, in favour of the views and wishes of the aggrieved brethren; a majority of the church had now openly taken their stand against the junior pastor. They had publickly disapproved of his services, and had refused to unite in calling a Mutual Council; while the society claimed and supported him as their minister.

At the meeting of the society, 26th of June, a committee was appointed to unite with Mr. Willson in calling an Ecclesiastical Council, to examine into the proceedings of

Mr. W.'s change of sentiments was made publick, upon the subject of the Trinity. And, in my opinion, the best apology that can be offered for this aged and reverend gentleman, who had formerly been highly respected by many, and censured by others, for his liberality in matters of faith, is the particular influence of a few members of the church; upon whose partial and disingenuous representations respecting Mr. W. and the divisions in the church and society, he had relied with too much confidence; and in whose interests and feelings, sanctified by the sacred name of conscience, he had, from long habits of intimacy and local attachments, too strongly participated.

the Consociation, to give their advice and to express their opinion upon matters of interest and importance to the society. The society also voted, at the request of Mr. W. that, if the Council advised to his dismissal, they should proceed to dissolve his pastoral relation.

About the middle of July, Mr. Willson and the committee agreed upon a Mutual Council, to convene on the 17th of September. They sent letters to nine churches.* Receiving information that several of the pastors could not attend at the time appointed, they sent letters to two more. On the 17th of September, the pastors and delegates of but three of the churches sent to, arrived.† Mr. W. and the committee agreed to request the pastors and delegates who were present, to form a Council. They accordingly formed, and the following was their Result :

“RESULT OF COUNCIL.

“In pursuance of a letter missive from the committee of the First Ecclesiastical Society in Brooklyn, Connecticut, and the Rev. Luther Willson, the following individuals assembled at the house of John Parish, Esq. in said town, Sept. 17, 1817, viz.

“From the church of Shrewsbury, Rev. JOSEPH SUMNER, D. D. *Pastor*—Brother THOMAS W. WARD, *Delegate*.

“From the 2d church of Worcester, AARON BANCROFT, D. D. *Pastor*—Deacon WILLIAM TROWBRIDGE, *Delegate*.

“From the 1st Congregational Church of Providence, Rev. HENRY EDES, *Pastor*—Brother JOSEPH CADY, jun. *Delegate*.

* I will here note, that letters, containing copies of the letter sent to the churches, were seasonably forwarded to the aggrieved brethren, the moderator of the Consociation, and Dr. Whitney, that they might have opportunity to make any representation that they pleased, before the Council to be convened, relative to the decision of the Consociation, and the business and objects for which the Council was called.

† On the next week after the Council, two pastors of churches sent to, came to Brooklyn, and the pastor and delegate of another church arrived at Providence on their way; and there being informed that the Council had met the week before, they proceeded no farther, but immediately returned. Had it not been for an unfortunate misunderstanding as to the time the Council were to convene. (which I shall not here be particular to explain,) a majority of the churches sent to would have been present in Council by their pastors and delegates.

“It became a question, whether it be expedient for the above individuals to form into a Council, they being a minor part of the churches to which the letter missive was addressed.

“While in conversation on this subject, they received the following communication from the committee and the Rev. Mr. Willson :

‘*Brooklyn, Sept. 17, 1817.*

‘To the Rev. Gentlemen and Delegates present from several of the churches, to which we sent letters, applying for their assistance and advice by the attendance of their Rev. Pastors and Delegates to join in council—we present the following request, (respectfully submitting it to the consideration of the gentlemen present,) that they form a Council to examine and result upon the subjects proposed for their investigation, opinion and advice, as contained in the letter missive.

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| <i>John Parish,</i> | } Society Committee. |
| <i>Roger W. Williams,</i> | |
| <i>Benjamin Gilbert,</i> | |
| <i>John Williams,</i> | |
| <i>Shubael Brown,</i> | |

‘*Luther Willson, in concurrence with the committee.*’

“In consequence of the above request, the Council formed, by electing the Rev. Dr. Sumner, Moderator, and the Rev. Dr. Bancroft, Scribe.

“Adjourned to the meeting-house.

“The scribe was appointed a committee to wait upon the Rev. Dr. Whitney, to inform him that the Council was in session, and ready to attend to the publick hearing.

“The Rev. moderator opened the business with prayer.

“The Council patiently and seriously attended to the communications of the committee of the society and pastor. After a full hearing of a narrative of all the facts and circumstances respecting existing difficulties—adjourned to the house of John Parish, Esq.

“Upon due deliberation—*Voted*, unanimously, the following as the Result of Council :

“This Council has been deeply impressed by the publick hearing, to which they have attended at the particular request of the Rev. Mr. Willson, and the committee of the

society; and they feel the greatest sympathy for them under the severe conflicts with which Divine Providence has permitted their Christian faith and constancy to be tried. But, as the Council is composed of a minor part of the churches whose assistance and advice were expected, they deem it improper for them to give any opinion respecting the jurisdiction of the Consociation of Windham County, or respecting their Result in this place; subjects, which involve not only the ecclesiastical rights of this society, the ministerial character and standing of the Rev. Mr. Willson in this church, but also the highest interests of Christianity through the community.

“The Council is, however, willing to express an opinion, as desired, on the expediency of a dissolution of the pastoral relation between the Rev. Mr. Willson and the society.

“In consideration of the very peculiar circumstances now existing among this Christian people, they are constrained to say, that they think his dismissal adviseable.

“As the parties have invested this Council with the necessary power in this case, they do hereby declare the pastoral relation between the Rev. Luther Willson and the first ecclesiastical society in Brooklyn dissolved.

“Should implicit submission be yielded to the proceedings of Consociation by churches confessedly consociated, yet this Council without reserve give it as their settled opinion, that the decision of Consociation respecting an article of faith, which has been a subject of controversy in every age of the Christian church, and on which the greatest and best men have been divided, does not affect the clerical character of a preacher of the gospel among churches and societies *not* consociated.

“With high satisfaction this Council notice, that through the long and bitter controversy which has existed among this people, the moral character of the Rev. Mr. Willson remains unimpeached, and that no ministerial deficiencies or defects have been alleged against him. They cheerfully declare, that the review of the measures and conduct of Mr. Willson, through the various scenes of this unhappy controversy, has given the most satisfactory evidence of a pacifick and charitable temper, and of those mild and conciliatory virtues which are among the bright-

est ornaments of the Christian character, and the most efficacious means of ministerial usefulness.

“The Council appreciate his theological attainments, and ministerial qualifications. They invite him to Christian and ministerial communion in their own churches, and they cordially recommend him to every portion of the Christian community, where the great Head of the Church may call him. They devoutly pray, that God may crown his future days with peace, add lustre to his future example, success to his future labours, length to his life, and, at last, to his fidelity a crown of glory.

“The Council tender their condolence to the society under their heavy afflictions. The society well know the ecclesiastical and civil laws of the state. They can duly estimate the worth of their Christian rights. While they are disposed vigorously to exert themselves to maintain the liberty wherewith Christ has made them free, they will endeavour to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. While they repel every attempt from others to exercise dominion over their own faith, they will readily grant to all the liberty they claim, and steadily pursue the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another.

“The Council commend you to God. May he delight to dwell with and bless you. May he imbue your minds with that wisdom which is from above; which is first pure; then peaceable; gentle, and easy to be entreated; full of mercy and good fruits; without partiality and without hypocrisy.

“Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy—to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen.

JOSEPH SUMNER,
AARON BANCROFT,
HENRY EDES,
THOMAS W. WARD,
WILLIAM TROWBRIDGE,
JOSEPH CADY, Jr.

“*Brooklyn, September 18th, 1817.*”

“A true copy. Attest,

“AARON BANCROFT, *Scribe.*”

As soon as Mr. Willson was dismissed from his pastoral relation to the society, it became a serious question among those who adhered to the power of the Consociation, whether he was a member of the church. This question had employed considerable thought and conversation among ministers and Christians, who were professedly conversant with ecclesiastical proceedings. Mr. W. claimed to be a member of the church after the decision of the Consociation. His connexion with the church was, however, denied by leading members who had been opposed to his ministry. After the question had been referred to the General Association, and to the Consociation of Windham County, it was finally settled that he was a member. Consequently, the church, at a meeting in October, voted to suspend him from all Christian privileges, until he should repent of the heresy, with which he had been charged.

“At a meeting of the congregational church in Brooklyn, Oct. 27th, 1817, the church passed the following vote:

‘Whereas Mr. Luther Willson has been found guilty on a charge of heresy by the Consociation of this county, and has been frequently admonished by the members of this church for that crime; also by the Consociation in their late Result; therefore it is the opinion of this church, that he ought to be, and is hereby suspended from the communion of this church, till he retracts and reforms.’

“Copy of the original vote, examined by

“JOSIAH WHITNEY, *Pastor.*”

The church had now, by the influence of the Consociation, and of the Rev. Dr. Whitney, their pastor, entered into the views of the aggrieved brethren, and acted with decision in the case of Mr. Willson. This first act of the church, that was of a definite and decided character, after they had adopted the new system which had been prepared for them, is precisely what was to have been expected. As to the circumstances which it mentions as the ground of Mr. W.’s suspension, it is characterized with subtilty and misrepresentation.

This vote was prepared before the meeting, and was moved by one who had been a leading individual among the aggrieved brethren; and it was no doubt intended as a record to inform posterity, that the church in Brooklyn

once had a pastor who was *charged with heresy*, and that the Consociation found him guilty of the crime which was alleged against him ; whereas the Consociation, for reasons that are not known, (as the subject was not discussed by them in publick,) did not *presume* to declare Mr. W. *guilty of heresy*. There is apparently a remarkable caution in the Result, not to declare the pastor guilty of the "crime of heresy," the "crime" for which he was cited to answer.

This act of the church was also to inform the publick, that the church and the Consociation had been faithful, according to their Christian obligations, in using their endeavours to convince the pastor of the crime, with which he had been charged, and of which, previously to their admonition, they had judged him guilty.

The vote declares, that "the members of the church had frequently admonished the pastor for that crime." The phrase, "the members of the church," would convey to every reader, that the author meant by it the members of the church generally, or collectively. In direct contradiction, therefore, to what I consider the obvious sense of this vote, I now take it upon me to state, (what I have declared in substance before,) that, of about thirty brethren of the church, not so many as four ever admonished Mr. W. for the crime of heresy, (unless publick reproaches, or observations and hints that are incidental, are called admonitions;) nor so many as six ever admonished him of his error as *fundamental*, as essential to salvation, or to the Christian character.

As to the admonition of the Consociation, mentioned in the vote, I will refer the reader to the Result, which contains the only admonition administered by that body.

After they had deposed Mr. W. from the ministry, rejected him from their fellowship, and dissolved his pastoral relation to the church in Brooklyn, they are complaisant enough to say—"and tenderly admonishing their late pastor to return to the Christian faith;" and, as a farther expression of their tenderness, and to give efficacy to their reproof by a direct and personal application, they were careful to inform the pastor and the publick, (after refusing an explanation of a misunderstanding that had unfortunately occurred,) that the pastor was so deficient in moral rectitude,

as to violate an agreement, which, on their part, was pacifick and liberal.

To close my observations upon the vote of the church, I will state, that no admonition was administered to Mr. W. by the church, or any of its members, at the meeting when he was suspended from communion.

I have now finished my Review of the controversy relative to Mr. W.'s ministry, and his connexion with the church. I feel it to be a matter of regret, that I cannot, consistently with the limits which I had prescribed to myself in this Review, extend the history of the church in Brooklyn to a later period.

I shall here only observe, that after the suspension of Mr. W. from communion, the principal authors of the new system, "in the full tide" (as they apprehended) "of successful experiment," entered upon a course of discipline (or of what some would call persecution) against several members of the church. They had now commenced the work of reformation upon a more extensive plan. Three members who had been active and influential in support of Mr. W.'s ministry, and especially of his Christian and ministerial rights, were selected as victims of their pious zeal, to be sacrificed upon the altar of truth and love. The business of reformation, having all the interest of novelty, went on rapidly for a time. The principal actors in this scene, who were naturally of a warm temperament, and were distinguished for their resolution and perseverance, appeared strong in the faith, and full of expectation. But unfortunately, in their progress, they discovered many and increasing difficulties, which they had not foreseen. They saw, when it was too late, that, in their first movements, there was a capital defect. They soon learnt by experience, that what they had recently gained in zeal, they had lost in prudence and management. Obligated to contend with the current of publick opinion, and with obstacles that were numerous and unexpected, they considered their course too critical and adventurous to be pursued. Their zeal abated; their operations were suspended; and the object of reformation, by direct and decisive measures, was relinquished, at least for a time. How soon the work of discipline will be revived, (an employment in which they engaged with much apparent satisfaction,) it is difficult to

conjecture. I am however satisfied, that they who engaged in it before, will not enter upon it again, until they are prepared to act more deliberately, and are favoured with a fair prospect of success.

The church in Brooklyn in its present situation, instead of resembling "a city set on an hill, and giving light to the world," has more the resemblance of "a city that is broken down and without walls."

In consequence of the pretensions of some of its members to pre-eminent purity and soundness in the faith, of private animosities, and of disaffection and hatred, occasioned by a self-confident and schismatick spirit, there has been no observance of a sacramental communion for more than a year. And how is it to be expected, that asperities will be softened, animosities extinguished, and Christian humility and truth prevail, until the members in general, by an example of forbearance and condescension, practically allow to each other, in their difference of opinion, the exercise and enjoyment of equal rights; and, in the faithful observance of the ordinances of Christ, cultivate a meek and benevolent spirit.

I think it proper to remark, that while the church has been thrown into confusion by its divisions, and the charity and communion of its members have been seriously interrupted by a difference of opinion that is inevitable among Christians in this state of imperfection, the society have as yet maintained those principles of religious liberty, which are essential to the permanent existence and general welfare of every community. And I hope they will continue to realize, that the rights secured to a Christian society by these principles, are too valuable to be given away at the exorbitant claims of ecclesiastical interference—too sacred to be regarded with indifference. I trust they will never think so lightly of their Christian rights, as to acquiesce in a system of intolerance and restrictive communion.

Let every citizen, and every Christian, duly estimate the worth of a good conscience, and the importance of a correct knowledge of Christian doctrines and precepts, as one who must give an account to his Lord. But let him never resign his understanding, which was given him by the inspiration of the Almighty, to the fallible guidance and authority of men. And let opinions be estimated, more par-

ticularly, by their habitual and practical influence in forming the moral character, and in contributing to the happiness of society.

Religion, as to its motives and obligations, its spirit, tendency, and ultimate effects, is not to be regarded with indifference and insensibility. Any subject that is worthy of inquiry and investigation, and, especially, that involves in it important consequences, either immediate or remote, demands attention, and may well excite a degree of solicitude and zeal. And I trust it will be universally agreed, that religion, as to the objects it contemplates, the duties it enjoins, and the ends it pursues, is a subject of this kind. But we must not be unmindful, that religious zeal should always be accompanied with knowledge, and with true and practical humility. Otherwise it will grow into enthusiasm, and we shall have more occasion to deplore its desolations, than to admire its wisdom, or to rejoice in its amiable and happy effects.

There are two extremes, to which Christians in different circumstances, and of different sensibility, imagination, and habits of thinking, are apt to incline. In the one case, we discover too great an adherence to certain mysterious and inexplicable doctrines; and in the other, too much inclination to determine the credibility of the doctrines of revelation by what is frequently called the test of reason and philosophy. In the first instance, faith, valuing itself too much for its superior discoveries and attainments, and thus degenerating into obstinacy and superstition, loses almost the whole of that practical character, which is humble, amiable, and attractive. Reason, on the contrary, averse in its general principles to any thing like mystery, making too little use of the affections in religion, and reducing almost every thing to the cold calculations of abstract and philosophical principles—exhibits nothing to the observer but the unanimated features of a lifeless form.

But, if I am not mistaken, there is a happy temperature in religion, which neither oppresses by its intolerance, consumes with its zeal, nor congeals with its frigid calculations. It rather inspires and enlivens, until it diffuses through the soul a genial warmth, and exhibits, in the conversation and life, that powerful and attractive simplicity, which cannot fail to engage the affections, and command

respect. Let it therefore be the care of every Christian, every church, and every society, to preserve the happy medium between the extremes. Amidst all their speculations, and differences of opinion, let them (if they please) use their endeavours to convince and persuade. At the same time, conscious of the imperfections of the human mind, the deceitfulness of the heart, and of the frailty of human nature, let them endeavour to possess "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Let all remember, that "now we see through a glass darkly"—"now we know in part"—"And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

ARTICLES,

For the Administration of Church Discipline, unanimously agreed upon, and consented to, by the Elders and all the Churches in the Colony of Connecticut, in New-England, convened by Delegation in a General Council, at Saybrook, September 9, 1708.

I. THAT the elder or elders of a particular church, with the consent of the brethren of the same, have power and ought to exercise church discipline according to the rule of God's word, in relation to all scandals that fall out within the same. And it may be meet in all cases of difficulty, for the respective pastors of particular churches, to take advice of the Elders of the churches in the neighbourhood, before they proceed to censure in such cases. Matth. xviii. 17; Heb. xiii. 17; 1 Cor. v. 4, 5, 12; 2 Cor. ii. 6; Prov. xi. 14; Acts xv. 12;

II. That the churches which are neighbouring each to other, shall consociate for mutual affording to each other such assistance as may be requisite, upon all occasions ecclesiastical. And that the particular pastors and churches, within the respective counties in this government, shall be one Consociation (or more, if they shall judge meet) for the end aforesaid. Psal. cxxii. 3, 4, 5, and cxxxiii. 1; Eccl. iv. 9 to 12; Acts xv. 2, 6, 22, 23; 1 Tim. iv. 14; 1 Cor. xvi. 1.

III. That all cases of scandal that fall out within the circuit of any of the aforesaid Consociations, shall be brought to a Council of the elders, and also messengers of the churches within the said circuit, i. e. the churches of one Consociation, if they see cause to send messengers, when there shall be need of a Council for the determination of them. 3 John 9, 10; 1 Cor. xvi. 1; Gal. vi. 1, 2; 2 Cor. xiii. 2; Acts xv. 22; 2 Cor. viii. 23.

IV. That according to the common practice of our churches, nothing shall be deemed an act or judgment of any Council, which hath not the major part of the elders present concurring, and such a number of the messengers present as make the majority of the Council: Provided, that if any such church shall not see cause to send any messengers to the Council, or the persons chosen by them shall not attend, neither of these shall be any obstruction to the proceedings of the Council, or invalidate any of their acts. Acts xv. 23; 1 Cor. xiv. 32, 33.

V. That when any case is orderly brought before any Council of the churches, it shall there be heard and determined, which (unless orderly removed from thence) shall be a final issue; and all parties therein concerned shall sit down and be determined thereby. And the Council so hearing and giving the result or final issue in the said case as aforesaid, shall see their determination or judgment duly executed and attended, in such way or manner as shall in their judgment be most suitable and agreeable to the word of God. Acts xv.; 1 Cor. v. 5; 2 Cor. ii. 6, 11, and xiii. 2; Phil. iii. 15; Rom. xiv. 2, 3.

VI. That, if any pastor and church doth obstinately refuse a due attendance and conformity to the determination of the Council that hath the cognizance of the case, and determineth it as above, after due patience used, they shall be reputed guilty of scandalous contempt, and dealt with as the rule of God's word in such case doth provide; and the sentence of non-communication shall be declared against such pastor and church. And the churches are to approve of the said sentence, by withdrawing from the communion of the pastor and church which so refuseth to be healed. Rom. xvi. 17; Mat. xviii. 15, 16, 17, by proportion. Gal. ii. 11 to 14; 2 Thess. iii. 6, 14.

VII. That in case any difficulties shall arise in any of the churches in this colony, which cannot be issued without considerable disquiet, that church in which they arise (or that minister or member aggrieved by them) shall apply themselves to the Council of the consociated churches of the circuit to which the said church belongs, who, if they see cause, shall thereupon convene, hear and determine such cases of difficulty; unless the matter brought before them shall be judged so great in the nature of it, or so doubtful in the issue, or of such general concern, that the said Council shall judge best that it be referred to a fuller Council, consisting of the churches of the other Consociation within the same county, (or of the next adjoining Consociation of another county, if there be not two Consociations in the county where the difficulty ariseth) who, together with themselves, shall hear, judge, determine, and finally issue such case according to the word of God. Prov. xi. 14; 1 Cor. xiv. 33, and xiv. 24, by proportion.

VIII. That a particular church, in which any difficulty doth arise, may, if they see cause, call a Council of the consociated churches of the circuit to which the said church belongs, before they proceed to sentence therein; but there is not the same liberty to an offending brother to call the said Council, before the church to which he belongs proceed to excommunication in the said case, unless with the consent of the church. Acts xv. 2; Matth. xviii. 15, 16, 17.

IX. That all the churches of the respective Consociations shall choose, if they see cause, one or two members of each church, to represent them in the Councils of the said churches, as occasion may call for them, who shall stand in that capacity, till new be chosen for the same service, unless any church shall incline to choose their messengers anew, upon the convening of such Councils. Acts xv. 2, 4; 2 Cor. viii. 23.

X. That the minister or ministers of the county towns, and, where there are no ministers in such towns, the two next ministers to the said town, shall, as soon as conveniently may be, appoint a time and place for the meeting of the elders and messengers of the churches in the said county, in order to their forming themselves into one or more Consociations, and notify the said time and place to the elders and churches of that county, who shall attend at the same, the elders in their own persons, and the churches by their messengers, if they see cause to send them. Which elders and messengers so assembled in council, as also any other Council hereby allowed of, shall have power to adjourn themselves as need shall be, for the space of one year, after the beginning or first session of the said Council, and no longer. And that minister who was chosen at the last session of any Council to be moderator, shall, with the advice and consent of two more elders, (or, in case of the moderator's death, any two elders of the same Consociation,) call another Council within the circuit, when they shall judge there is need thereof. And all Councils may prescribe rules as occasion may require, and whatsoever they shall judge needful within their circuit, for the well performing, and orderly managing their several acts, to be attended by them, or matters that come under their cognizance. Phil. iv. 8; 1 Cor. xiv. 40; Phil. iii. 15, 16; Rom. xiv. 2, 3.

XI. That if any person or persons, orderly complained of to a Council, or that are witnesses to such complaints, (having regular notification to appear,) shall refuse or neglect so to do, in the place and at the time specified in the warning given, except they or he give some satisfying reason thereof to the said Council, they shall be judged guilty of scandalous contempt. Col. ii. 5; Heb. xiii. 17; 1 Thess. v. 14.

XII. That the teaching elders of each county shall be one association, (or more, if they see cause,) which association or associations shall assemble twice a year at least, at such time and place as they shall appoint, to consult the duties of their office, and the common interest of the churches, who shall consider and resolve questions and cases of importance which shall be offered by any among themselves, or others; who also shall have power of examining and recommending the candidates of the ministry to the

work thereof. Psal. cxxxiii. 1; Acts xx. 17, 28 to 32; Mal. ii. 7; Matt. v. 14; Deut. xvii. 8, 9, 10; 1 Tim. v. 22; 2 Tim. ii. 15; 1 Tim. iii. 6, 10; Rom. x. 15; 1 Tim. iv. 14.

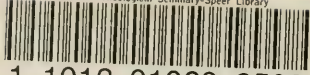
XIII. That the said associated pastors shall take notice of any among themselves that may be accused of scandal, or heresy, unto or cognizable by them: examine the matter carefully; and if they find just occasion, shall direct to the calling of the Council, where such offenders shall be duly proceeded against. Lev. xix. 17; 1 Cor. v. 6; Tit. iii. 10, 11; Isa. lii. 11; Mal. iii. 3; Tit. i. 6 to 9; Deut. xiii. 14; 3 John 9, 10; Rev. ii. 14, 15; 1 Tim. i. 20, and iv. 14.

XIV. That the said associated pastors shall also be consulted by bereaved churches belonging to their association, and recommend to such churches such persons as may be fit to be called and settled in the work of the gospel ministry among them. And if such bereaved churches shall not seasonably call and settle a minister among them, the said associated pastors shall lay the state of such bereaved churches before the General Assembly of this colony, that they may take such order concerning them as shall be found necessary for their peace and edification. 2 Cor. xi. 28; Phil. ii. 19, 20, 21; 2 Tim. ii. 15; Tit. i. 6 to 10; Isa. xlix. 23.

XV. That it be recommended as expedient, that all the associations of this colony do meet in a general association by their respective delegates, one or more out of each association, once a year: the first meeting to be at Hartford, at the time of the general election next ensuing the date hereof; and so annually in all the counties successively, at such time and place as they, the said delegates, shall in their annual meetings appoint. Heb. xiii. 1.

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